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RETREAT CONFERENCES FOR RELIGIOUS.

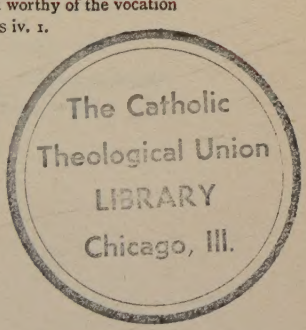
Retreat Conferences for Religious

First Series

By the RIGHT REV. BISHOP COX, O.M.I.
Vicar Apostolic of the Transvaal

WITHDRAWN

"I . . . beseech you that you walk worthy of the vocation in which you are called."—EPHESIANS iv. 1.



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To

ENGLISH-SPEAKING RELIGIOUS

WHO, BEING CONSECRATED TO GOD,

LABOUR WITH MUCH DEVOTEDNESS IN MANY LANDS

FOR HIS GLORY,

THIS BOOK OF EXHORTATIONS

IS RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED BY

THE AUTHOR

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RETREAT CONFERENCES FOR RELIGIOUS

FIRST EVENING.

I.

OPENING DISCOURSE—THE RETREAT.

'Be renewed in the spirit of your mind.'—Eph. iv. 23.

You have interrupted the ordinary course of your duties and pursuits in order to enter into spiritual retreat. The exercises that you will follow, the instructions or conferences that will be given, and the self-examination that you will make, will have for object the renewal of which the Apostle speaks: 'Be renewed in the spirit of your mind.'

Even if happily your conscience may not reproach you with neglect of duty, or with remissness and tepidity in doing what your state of life demands of you, even so you should yet from time to time or annually (Can. 595) renew yourselves in the spirit of your religious vocation, with the view of keeping yourselves fervent and exact in fulfilling its obligations. You should, moreover, eagerly desire to be favoured with whatever fresh light or new inspiration your retreat may be destined in God's good providence to afford you. You re-

member that our Lord said: ' Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice, for they shall have their fill ' (St. Matt. v. 6). What happy fruits of sanctification may you not, under this promised blessing of our Lord, expect, if you experience this holy hunger and thirst, and if you stimulate your fervent desires of pleasing God more and more !

But is it not a fact that to all of us the annual retreat is more or less a necessity; or, at any rate, that it marks out for us a course of exercises that it is very desirable to follow, perhaps on account of our having, to some extent, fallen from our first fervour; or because we have taken a low view of our obligations, or have been entrapped in some of the snares and pitfalls that are commonly laid by the many enemies of our soul for our spiritual detriment and undoing ? Let us not delude ourselves by fancying that the retreat would be very useful to many, but that our own present condition or dispositions are such that *we* do not require it. Did not St. Paul, though consumed by divine charity, exclaim: ' I am not conscious to myself of anything, yet I am not thereby justified '?

When our Lord bade St. John write to the Bishops of the seven Churches in Asia, something was found against five of them, while the other two (the Bishops of Smyrna and Philadelphia), who were commended, were cautioned against falling away. If we strive to enter fervently upon this retreat, and if we are really in earnest in seeking to know if our dispositions are all that they ought to be, perhaps, before its close, we shall be convinced that some things are wanting

to us, and even, it may be, that we have transgressed and need to repent. The message may be conveyed to our conscience: 'I have against thee a few things' (Apoc. ii. 14). Ah, well will it be if the things that are unsatisfactory are few and not many!

It may be asked why we need a retreat. At the very outset, and as a necessary preliminary to making the retreat well, we ought to be convinced of its utility, so as to appreciate it as it merits to be appreciated.

If it be not apparent that we actually need the retreat on account of some serious falling away from the spirit of true religious, we may answer this inquiry in words from the pen of the great Doctor of the Church, St. Augustine.* 'While our soul,' he says, 'is here below in this world, it finds itself engaged in a number of pursuits that engross its attention; it is bound to so many exterior objects, that, little by little, it loses the liberty and ardour of its holiest desires. In this state it is so far deprived of the wings and fire of divine love that it cannot raise itself towards heaven, where are its life, its strength, and its happiness; so that it has need, from time to time, to struggle to release itself from these worldly cares, in order to take its flight, by its prayers and longings, which are the wings of its love, towards the bosom of God; there to find, in the delights of contemplation, a purer fire and more ardent desires of the Sovereign Good—desires that diminish and are lost in the enjoyment of the good things of this world.'

* Quoted in Courbon's 'Entretiens Spirituels,' 49th.

Many things are capable of keeping us back from God, to whom, however, we may ever approach nearer and nearer. A retreat should help us to correct our faultiness, and to make greater effort to please God in our whole conduct.

Impressed with the utility, if not the absolute necessity of retreats, Founders of Religious Congregations have laid down in their constitutions that a few days every year shall be devoted to the exercises of a retreat; and this practice is now insisted upon by the Canon Law of the Church (Can. 595). The Founders, moreover, prescribe that, in addition, one day every month shall be given to the same holy exercises.

We should regard the time of the annual retreat as one of enlightenment, of conversion, of generous resolutions, and, finally, of movements of grace. I will say a few words about each of these results that should attend a retreat seriously entered into.

What may, in the first place, be said of the enlightenment that a retreat should afford? The things we may learn are a keener sense of the supernatural, the value of piety and regularity, our indebtedness to God, our own weakness and our dependence on God, the grandeur of our religious vocation, the danger of remissness and tepidity, some insight into the character of our lives and actual faults, also lessons as to our duties, as to our future, and as to the sure way.

Secondly, in a retreat well made, we repent and are converted; and this conversion is spontaneous; it is also genuine, a quality that perhaps is some-

times doubtful in our weekly confessions. Our conversion is also effective, and is accompanied by full determination to avoid all danger of relapse. Thus our conversion becomes a source of consolation to ourselves, and produces a sense of satisfaction with our retreat. Let us hope that this present retreat may yield this desirable fruit.

Thirdly, as to generous resolutions; these are taken in the light and grace of the retreat, and as a practical result of it. They will most likely correspond with what we have learned concerning our state during the retreat, partly from the instructions, but principally from our self-examination.

Finally, the movements of grace are the affections called forth. These affections may be of various kinds. There may be elicited a more earnest desire to labour for the glory of God, and for the 'one thing necessary,' and a spirit of greater devotedness to our neighbour's spiritual welfare. There may be experienced a fresh impulse towards aiming at perfection, a more intense attraction towards piety and religious observance, and, in some souls, a more distinct yearning for God as the Sovereign Good.

You would do well to weigh these advantages offered by the retreat. May they not be wanting to you in this present annual retreat! You know that, if grace is to be operative in you, you must correspond with it. God helping you, you will put yourselves in the required dispositions. You should therefore enter upon the retreat with a firm resolution of making it as well as you can, and of profiting

by the lights and graces that the Holy Spirit may bestow upon you during it. Be not less earnest about it than are the devout secular persons who, retiring from the world for a time, give themselves up with so much fervour to the pious exercises of a retreat. There are religious who fancy that they have not so much need of these exercises as secular persons have, but is this really so?

Persons in the world recognize the dangers to which they are exposed, or the remiss state into which they have fallen: they are alarmed, they seek a remedy, they hope to find it in retreat. But some religious, unfortunately, often consider themselves to be pretty well all that they should be, and they are content to remain as they are. They do not reflect that if they be not all that they should be, that if there be but one unrestrained evil propensity, but one moral weakness indulged in, there may be danger even of risking their salvation. Therefore, to fancy that they have no need of a retreat is certainly a dangerous delusion. I need not say that it is not exemplary religious who indulge this mistaken notion.

For such faulty religious to be content to remain as they are, and to die without solid virtue; to be full of imperfections, and to make no effort to correct them; to be able to become more perfect, and yet not to wish and strive to become so; is it not very foolishness and lamentable neglect? Again—for we must beware of cowardice and discouragement—to despair of doing that which one has not yet done, is it not to ignore the power of grace, and the tender-

ness of the divine compassion? God helping us, we all may attain the perfection of the holy state to which we are called; and if we fail to do this, the fault will be entirely our own. The annual retreat is, in the good providence of God, one of the helps to our perfection.

Seeing, then, what are the rich graces that should result from the retreat, I pray that God may speak to your hearts and consciences; and—what is of equal importance—that you may listen to His voice. Say humbly and earnestly to Him, as Samuel did of old: 'Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth' (1 Kings iii. 10).

Do we not desire that God may speak to us, and do we not wish to hear? We cannot, in excuse, say that during the retreat we shall not have time to hear and to attend. Surely we all have something to learn.

'Speak, Lord'; perhaps we have previously heard like Heli, to whom also God's message came; but like Heli, too, we have not heeded it. The word that came to him was a command to do his duty, and a warning lest he should neglect it. Such may be the message that we shall receive during this annual retreat. Let us be willing to receive it. If we be true servants of God, and not unmindful ones, as was Heli, we shall hear the heavenly message, the desirable lesson, the consoling truth, the salutary warning: 'Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth.'

Too long and too often, perhaps, have we listened to worldly and useless conversations, to uncharitable discourses, to flattering speeches—what have they

profited us? Let us now be wise, and open our ears, and our hearts, too, to the voice of God.

'Speak, Lord'; yes, speak, O Lord; speak in the depths of our hearts; speak distinctly to our consciences. Every word of Thine is a grace, a mercy, a token of love and compassion, a word of wisdom and truth, to be reflected upon, treasured up, and acted upon; for Thy Apostle says: 'Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only' (St. James i. 22).

What heavenly message, what words to arrest attention, what moving appeal to touch your hearts, may be vouchsafed to you during this retreat? To many, before now, has come the message: 'Be converted and live' (Ezek. xviii. 23); for even the chosen servants of God have proved faithless. Many of God's elect are to reach the heavenly kingdom, not by the way of innocence, but by that of repentance. Of those who are now devout, how many, at one time or another, strayed in the ways of evil, known perhaps only to God and their own troubled consciences. They were the victims of some weakness or delusion, and they remained in their misery until they heard the message of mercy, and felt grace once more struggling for the mastery in their souls. God appealed to the faithless Jews, saying: 'What iniquity have your fathers found in Me, that they are gone far from Me, and have walked after vanity? . . . Know thou and see that it is an evil and a bitter thing for thee, to have left the Lord thy God' (Jer. ii. 5, 19). These once faithless servants of God heard some such appeal, and in sorrow and remorse they turned back to God, to love Him, after

their repentance, more sincerely and more perseveringly than before their fall.

To all will come the gracious invitation: 'Learn of Me' (St. Matt. xi. 29); for our Lord has constituted Himself a Guide and Model for all His followers. He is the perfect Model that religious should keep ever before them. Again and again must they raise their eyes to our Lord to learn of Him how to love God, how to fulfil their end in life, how to practise humility, meekness, charity, patience, obedience, and self-denial. During the retreat you will meditate upon the forcible lessons which our Lord's words and life teach; and you will strive to learn them with renewed zest and determination, that you may advance further in the path of perfection in pursuance of your beautiful vocation.

To all also will come this other gracious invitation: 'Follow Me' (St. Matt. viii. 22; xvi. 24)—that is, Be true to your vocation. Our Lord is now your only Master; His will must ever be the law of your lives. You must not shrink from whatever labour, care, or suffering your religious life may demand of you. At the voice of our Saviour the Apostles left all things; but it was not that they might possess in this world honour, pleasures, or riches: they left all things to follow their Lord in poverty, labour, persecution, sufferings, and death. You, too, must take up your cross daily and follow your Lord. This needs fortitude and self-denial. Have you shrunk from the Cross? Have you followed the dictates of self-love, of sloth, or of the world? Who has been your real master? Now in this retreat

you will turn to our Lord, and say: ' Master, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou shalt go ' (St. Matt. viii. 19); and you will add, with the Spouse in the Canticles: ' Draw me, we will run after Thee to the odour of Thy ointments ' (Cant. i. 3).

Finally, you will be assured, after having made a good retreat, that God has accepted your repentance, and that He holds out to you every help necessary to enable you to persevere in a dutiful and fervent religious life. Our Lord will say to you during the retreat: ' Lovest thou Me ?' and you will be able, at its close, to reply with St. Peter: ' Yea, Lord, Thou knowest that I love Thee ' (St. John xxi. 16). What will then remain for you to do, but to abide in His love ? This is His desire and command: let it be also your desire and firm resolve.

Be resolved, with God's blessing and grace, to turn the retreat to practical account. Your prayers and recollectedness, your meditations and pious reading, your silence and self-examination, and your attention to the conferences, will be directed to this end. If the retreat does not teach you anything new, it will yet be a means of reminding you of many truths, or duties of your state that you should reflect upon; so, in this sense, it will afford enlightenment. During it, you will discover your faults and shortcomings, and these you are fully determined to repent of and correct; therefore it will be a time of conversion. The retreat, if well made, will perhaps convince you of some needed improvement, and this you will resolve, with God's help, to effect; so it will be an occasion of generous resolutions. And,

finally, you know how sluggish even religious sometimes are in doing good, how tied down to earthly things, and often how ungenerous with God; but you will pray God for His grace to move your hearts, to bring its influence to bear upon your future lives; and this grace will not be denied you. So the retreat will be for you an occasion of the movements of grace.

If the retreat proves operative in you in these ways, it will be a time of spiritual renewal. St. Paul says: ' Be renewed in the spirit of your mind.' Be renewed in the love of your vocation, and in religious observance. Place yourselves, with God's help, in the happy condition and holy dispositions in which you would like to be when God will summon you from this world. If you endeavour to do this, you will make a good retreat.

In your meditation to-morrow morning find place for some of the reflections that I have put before you, such as the object of an annual retreat, and the fruits it should produce in your appreciations and future conduct. And be resolved to correspond with the grace of the retreat. Avail yourselves of this special time of recollection and prayer, and drive away all dissipating thoughts. Consecrate these days to the honour of the Sacred Heart; and beg our Blessed Lady, St. Joseph, and your Guardian Angels to intercede for you with God Almighty, that they may be days of spiritual refreshment and interior peace, fruitful in promise of greater piety and devotedness in His service.

II.

RELIGIOUS PROFESSION.

'I therefore . . . beseech you that you walk worthy of the vocation in which you are called.'—EPH. iv. 1.

YOUR vocation to religion is an inestimable grace. The words of our Divine Lord to His Apostles may be applied also to you: 'I have chosen you out of the world' (St. John xv. 19). I invite you to consider this morning the meaning of what you did when, following your vocation, you consecrated yourselves to God by your religious profession.

What is the religious profession? Let us see what it is. In the first place, we must answer the question by declaring that the religious profession is the perfect accomplishment of man's most essential duty.

In common with all things created by God, you belong to God, and have been made by Him for Himself—that is, to render Him your entire homage. Thus, all you are and have—your body, soul, mind, liberty, health, possessions, talents, and time, your life itself—are all from Him, and should be for Him. 'Render therefore . . . to God the things that are

God's' (St. Matt. xxii. 21). 'What shall I render to the Lord for all the things that He hath rendered to me?' (Ps. cxv. 12). You are under a lasting obligation to love God with all your mind, with all your heart, and with all your strength. You know this precept well; but who are they that fully accomplish the just, reasonable, necessary and sublime duty that it enjoins? Let me answer this question: it is good religious, and they do it by their profession. A professed religious may say: I am no longer my own; I belong now to God. Now, I offer Him not only the fruit of the tree, but also the very tree itself, with all the fruit that it may ever bring forth. I have no part now with the world, nor do I wish ever to belong to it or to serve it again. I have given all things to Him from whom I have received them. For God's sake, I have renounced the use of my goods, and to Him I have consecrated myself, body and soul, to be henceforward a victim ever living and ever immolated.

As to pleasures, I renounce not only all that are unlawful, but even such as are allowable, but incompatible with my present state of life. As to my liberty, henceforward it shall belong to my superiors, who hold in my regard the place of God, to dispose of it as the Rule may require. I vow to God poverty, chastity, and obedience.

Professed religious may then reason thus: Since I wish to keep nothing back, may I not hope that this offering of myself to God will be pleasing in His sight? If I have given Him myself, and all that I possess, it would seem that, as I have no more to

give, He cannot ask for more. How consoling to religious should be this view of their consecration to God!

But, O fickle mortals, will you forget your solemn promises? Will you withdraw any portion of the holocaust? We read in Isaias: 'I am the Lord that love judgment, and hate robbery in a holocaust' (lxi. 8). You know that by your profession you became in a special manner God's property, all His own. Would it not then be in the nature of a sacrilege to take back what has been so entirely and religiously consecrated to God?

What will you say? In a spirit of fervour and generosity you will exclaim: 'Ah no, my God, I will never be guilty of such unworthy conduct. Far from withdrawing any part of the sacrifice, I will rather renew the holocaust day by day; and at the close of this retreat I will joyfully, fully, and solemnly renew the act of my consecration to Thee. That I belong to God shall be my life-long glory and consolation, even as I hope that this my consecration will fill me with comfort at the hour of my death.'

Such, indeed, should be your sentiments; and you will devoutly beg of God to dispose of you as of His own property, and not to await the indication of your will. He may do this by a twofold right: first, because you are His; and, secondly, because you place yourselves wholly at His disposal.

Ask of God the grace to be good religious—that is, entirely devoted to Him and His interests, even as He deigns so graciously and lovingly to provide for you and your interests. Your only ambition, as

it would indeed be the greatest source of your consolation, should be to be for ever and wholly God's. He has made you for Himself: and by your religious profession you have dedicated yourselves to Him, to belong entirely to Him.

Let us see again what the religious profession is. In the second place, it may be regarded as a solemn renewal of your baptism.

God has made you Christians. What a happiness for you! Never cease to praise and thank God for having conferred upon you this inestimable grace. There are millions in the world who have not received it. You received it as infants without knowing why. The baptismal promises were made for you without your knowing at the time what was promised. Perhaps since then, and until you entered religion, you did not give much thought to what those promises entailed on your part. But, on the day of your religious profession, you took upon yourselves the obligations of a Christian in their full extent. You did this knowingly and willingly, with dutiful respect for those obligations, and with full determination to comply with them. The act of renouncement and consecration that you then made implied as much, for it was an act of entire fealty to God.

Your religious profession betokened that you renounced Satan and everything in the world that might turn your heart from God. You enrolled yourselves under the standard of Jesus Christ, taking Him as your only Lord and Master; and, not content with engaging yourselves to obey His precepts, you undertook also to follow His counsels. You then

vowed to Him to live and die poor, chaste, and obedient, in imitation of Him; and you accepted the Rule of your Institute as the guide of your entire conduct.

Looking back upon your profession in the light of what we have been considering, do you not recognize that your offering to God in that solemn act was as a holocaust? Should you then be astonished to learn the view of it taken by Saints—namely, that by the religious profession your sins were all pardoned—not only as to their guilt, but even as to their punishment? Hence, according to this teaching, it was for you as a second baptism.

As you became by it the property of Jesus Christ, in a twofold sense—that is, by grace and by choice, by manifold necessity and by your own free act—I ask you to apply to yourselves the exhortation that might appropriately be addressed to an adult just baptized: 'Take care not to sully the white robe in which you have been clothed; take care not to lose your innocence. Let there not appear in you any more anything that might reveal that the "old man" that you have cast off is still in your heart. Your vows are inscribed in the very heavens, for you have not sworn to man but to God. Much better would it have been for you never to have made those solemn promises, than to have made them only to break them and disregard them.'

Remember, then, well what you did when you made your profession; take care not to forget your obligations; take care not to fall from your first fervour. Religious Orders and Institutes sprang up

in the Church when Christians had become remiss; take heed lest you become remiss; for it might then appear that you are not even true and sincere Christians. If ordinary Christians should walk without blemish, what must religious do? The psalmist says: 'Lord, who shall dwell in Thy tabernacle? or who shall rest in Thy holy hill? He that walketh without blemish and worketh justice' (Ps. xiv. 1, 2). This is the standard of living to which you are invited to aspire. Your faults and your frailty may keep you back, but you should ever press forward.

But do not go backwards. Take care not to fall into the condition of unfaithful religious—a condition more dangerous than that of secular persons who fall from a less sublime vocation. As there are places reserved in heaven for good religious high above those destined for ordinary Christians, so, we may suppose, are there, in the fiery abyss of punishment, deeper depths of suffering prepared for miserable religious, who dishonour the holy state of religion by mortal sin, and by the breaking of their vows, if they die without true repentance; deeper depths than will be allotted to bad Christians, whose graces had been less, and who had not been so enlightened and favoured as they.

Let us see, lastly, what the religious profession is. It is, in the third place, an irrevocable alliance between God and His creature.

God promises me life everlasting, His eternity, the everlasting possession of Himself; and I, having given Him myself, promise Him also my everlasting

homage and duty. So might religious have said at their profession. Yes, they consecrated to God, not only their whole being, but also their entire existence; so, should they have an eternity to live, or were it only a century, it should in each case be for God; they will always be God's, for so they have sworn.

From that time forward, neither health nor sickness; neither youth nor decaying years; neither consolation nor trial—nothing should ever separate them from God. They might say with Jephte (Judg. xi. 35): 'I have opened my mouth to the Lord, and I can do no other thing.' At their profession they gave themselves irrevocably to God: they must keep their vow.

But how shall they keep it? It may seem hard to flesh and blood, and to human inconstancy; religious, however, do not count upon their own strength, but upon help from on high. Their vocation was from God, and God will enable them to be faithful to it.

When David described the power of God in the creation, he did not forget to show that the stability of creation, comprising as it does elements so weak and so conflicting, comes also from God: 'He spoke and they were made; He commanded and they were created: He hath established them for ever, and for ages of ages; He hath made a decree, and it shall not pass away' (Ps. cxlviii. 5, 6). The same divine power will sustain religious, notwithstanding their natural weakness and inconstancy. Let such be your trust and confidence, as it should also be your consolation.

And now give a passing thought to the merit and gain resulting from the sacrifice which, at your profession, you as religious made of yourselves and of your lives to God. You will have the merit of all the good embraced in that act; the merit of all your days and years spent in the service of God; the merit of the trials consequent upon your having entered religion—even, let us hope, of the trials to which you thereby generously exposed yourselves, and which you were willing to endure, but which it may happen you will not actually experience. Being now professed religious, consecrated to God and working only for Him, you find comfort in the thought that you are dealing with God, and that you look to Him for your recompense. Everything you do for Him will be a source of gain to you. You find comfort also in the thought that the sacred engagements which you have contracted are of so exalted a character that they can be made only to God; but God is worthy to receive such engagements at your hands; and you, on your part, undertake them without risking anything. For is not God full of interest in you, and full of goodness and compassion? He is your Master, liberal and all-powerful, the complete and universal Master of your whole being; but a Master Who does not ask anything of you, if it be not that He may make you a return and a recompense; a Master Who never commands you to do anything that He is not ready Himself to help you to accomplish; a Master, lastly, Who only exposes you to the strife in order that He may give you the crown. It is therefore you who will in

every case be the gainers in all you do in His holy service in religion.

What consolation, then, and what joy and comforting assurance, your religious profession should afford you! You have by it consecrated yourselves to God, and you are His. With St. Paul you may say: 'I know Whom I have believed, and I am certain that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him' (2 Tim. i. 12). If you fail in your vocation, the whole blame must fall upon yourselves.

Having thus far dwelt upon what your religious profession signified; namely, an undertaking to fulfil the essential duty of homage and obedience to God; a practical renewal of your baptismal promises, by which you became as holocausts to God; and, finally, a bond or alliance not to be broken throughout the whole course of your lives, by which binding act you gave yourselves to God, while He, on His part, accepted you as though undertaking to treat you as His own; having, I say, dwelt upon this meaning and character of your religious profession, I now ask you to recall the views you proposed to yourselves when you thus bound yourselves to the religious life, and, moreover, to consider what the rest of the faithful expect to find in religious consecrated to God.

These reflections should impress you with the necessity of being imbued with the spirit of true religious, and of manifesting it in your exterior conduct.

When you embraced the religious life, you had

something more in view than to put on the habit and to live in a religious house. You had found the 'treasure hidden in a field,' or the 'pearl of great price' (St. Matt. xiii. 44, 46), to purchase which field or pearl you were willing to sell all you had. What does this mean? You resolved to seek the spiritual riches that are gained by the faithful observance of poverty, chastity, and obedience, and you left all things in order to walk in the path of religious perfection that leads to greater union with God. You were resolved not any longer to set your hearts upon what is comforting to nature, but upon what is profitable to the spirit. While desiring to consecrate your whole lives in a special manner to God, so as to render your salvation more secure, you perhaps thought also of atoning for your sins, or even of becoming victims of expiation for the world's sinfulness and ingratitude to God.

Such noble and inspiring ends are not, however, accomplished without effort, fervour, and constancy. If such laudable motives led you to embrace the religious life, and if they still persevere, they should now instigate you to use assiduousness in cultivating the true spirit of your holy vocation, and in practising religious observance. How great your first fervour was! It is quite refreshing and inspiriting to recall it! But now, after so many years spent in religion, are you still fervent?

You know that the longer a soldier serves, the more disciplined and soldierly he becomes. So should it be with religious. The longer you are in religion, the more you should love your holy voca-

tion, and adapt and conform your lives to religious discipline. You know, too, that it is an essential duty of your state ever to tend to perfection by the observance of your vows and rule.

In view of this obligation, what should be thought if any are to be found who, though long in religion, are more like seculars than religious; any to whom a great deal of the rule is a dead letter; any who have no love of discipline or regularity; any who cannot be brought to fulfil their duty except by a certain amount of humouring and coaxing; any who neglect their exercises of piety, as if—this is only a supposition—they imagine that they can have enough of the spirit of union with God, and of the unction of piety, without them ?

Let us suppose that fervent young religious are associated with any such as these. Do they, perhaps, discourage exactitude and fidelity in observing the rule ? Do they try to carry the fervent young religious along the stream with themselves ? Do they, by their baneful influence and example, if not by their outspoken advice, undo the work of years of religious training, and cause the dissipation of fruits of special graces, meritorious for the fervent young religious and of incalculable value to their Institute and to the Church ?

Let us, however, console ourselves by supposing that the young religious are serious about their vocation; that they are strong in principle and firm of resolve; that they value their rule, and cling to the advantages which the religious life offers; that they believe they have yet much to do if they would

reach the perfection to which they are called; and, finally, that they are conscious of the nature of their obligations, and fear to be unfaithful. This happily should prove a check to the older but less perfect religious. We can hardly believe that the older religious would still strive to undermine the good already achieved, and to stay further progress in the younger religious; but, if they were to do so, what an account they would have to give of such scandalous conduct!

We will now leave these painful suppositions; and let me, as a last matter for your consideration, ask you what the ordinary faithful expect you to be.

They know that, as religious, you are in a special way consecrated to God; that you have left the world and your relations to put on the garb of God's sworn servants, the holy religious habit. They reckon that your vocation has something sacred about it; that you have almost ceased to be ordinary mortals, since you have enlisted in, or rather been called to, so exalted a service. What, then, do they expect you to be? They expect you to be pious, given to prayer, prudent, and reserved in your manner, avoiding worldliness and dissipation, meek and humble of heart, gentle and charitable. They expect your lives to be in keeping with your profession. They know that you are bound, not only by the holy vows of religion, but also by your rules, and by community discipline. It may perhaps come to their knowledge that—whether through human respect or some other fault—you

are sometimes guilty of breaches of your rules and of this wise community discipline. If so, because they conceal their impressions from you, do not imagine that good Catholics are not thereby scandalized. When you are absent from your religious house, your conduct should always be edifying. When you go forth from it, you must carry with you the spirit and discipline of good religious; for, when away from your community, as well as when with it, your duty is to act up to your profession.

Do not seek to curry favour with secular persons by any compromise of your religious character and obligations. You have One to please and to serve, namely, your heavenly Lord and Master; so, no matter how far your various duties may seem to carry you away, and cause you distraction, you have always in the sanctuary of your heart a tabernacle in which He should repose, and where heart to heart you may entertain Him. Remember the words of David: 'As the eyes of servants are on the hands of their masters; as the eyes of the handmaid are on the hands of her mistress: so are our eyes unto the Lord our God' (Ps. cxxii. 2). Your first thought and motive should be to please God. Although you do not seek commendation from men but from God, be yet careful so to act that you may be spoken of as religious in your lives, zealous in your works, and exemplary in your conduct. Strive ever to carry out what your profession demands of you, and what you proposed to yourselves when entering religion. You will not in that case dis-

appoint devout seculars in their lawful expectations regarding the character of your lives.

In conclusion, reflect that being religious you should beware of acting like seculars. Each state of life is different; yet, just as some very pious seculars become almost like religious, so do some lax religious become very like seculars. If you love to associate with seculars, if you find more pleasure in spending your time of relaxation with them than with the members of your community, if you place yourselves unnecessarily under obligations to seculars, if you imitate them in your conversations and ways, then, religious as you are, you will become, in spirit and manner, like seculars. You surely do not wish this; this would indeed be deteriorating.

No, you will thank God that you have been called to religion. You recognize how sacred your obligations are, and you will strive to be faithful to them. You will love your holy and privileged vocation, and endeavour to be good religious—that is, to be religious not only by your profession, but also by your interior spirit, by your manner of acting, and by the edification of your lives.

'I therefore,' says St. Paul, 'beseech you that you walk worthy of the vocation in which you are called.' God helping you, you are determined to do this.

NOTE.—Canon 593. 'Each and every religious, superior as well as subject, is bound not only faithfully and integrally to observe the vows of which he has made profession, but also to order his life according to the rules and constitutions of his Institute, and thus tend to the perfection of his state.'

III.

HOLY POVERTY.

'Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.'—St. Matt. v. 3.

Much as the goods and wealth of this world are the object of men's desires and attachment, religious yet deem that it is by a special and highly privileged vocation that they have been called to renounce them. They have vowed poverty. Although by this vow they have renounced the independent use of any worldly goods, they have not, however, so stamped out the inclinations of the 'old man' within them that poor human nature may not feel attracted towards them. By such inclination religious may be led to offend in various ways against their vow.

Having made a vow of poverty, religious are strictly bound by it, according to the rules and constitutions of their Institute. They must therefore so watch over their inclinations and manner of acting as to avoid every kind of breach of their vow. In the Book of Numbers we read: 'If any man make a vow to the Lord, or bind himself by an oath; he shall not make his word void, but shall fulfil all that he promised' (xxx. 3). And Solomon says: 'It is much better not to vow, than after

a vow not to perform the things promised' (Eccles. v. 4).

It was our Divine Lord Who sanctified and consecrated by His own life the state of poverty; and we should learn to esteem and love it on His account. It should so rise, and so stand, in our eyes as to appear an exalted condition. There could not possibly be a nobler model for our imitation than Jesus Christ, and the nearer we approach Him in our imitation, the more perfect we shall become. We shall not, however, make any progress in this direction unless we love what He loved, and hate what He hated. But what lesson does His life give? By His words and conduct He has warned us against riches. His words are: 'Amen, I say to you, that a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven' (St. Matt. xix. 23). 'Woe to you that are rich; for you have your consolation' (St. Luke vi. 24).

If the disciple must not be greater than the master, what shall we say when we consider our Lord's practice of poverty? His birthplace was the resort of the outcast and homeless, and His first experiences were of the harshest kind in the manger of a wretched stable. The experiences that followed were as bitter, during the journeyings to and from Egypt, and in that land of exile, accompanied as they were by terrible privations. Even at Nazareth His was a hard lot; and during His missionary journeyings what privations and discomfort He endured! How often the dark still nights saw Him houseless in retired spots among the hills! 'The

foxes have holes, and the birds of the air nests; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head'; such were His words, but they were not uttered as a complaint. He cast in His lot, not with the rich, but with the poor; even His very clothing was sacrificed upon the altar of poverty when He gave His life for man's salvation.

Such a grandeur and nobility did our Lord communicate to the state of poverty that it became dear to His followers. We know how the first Christians sold their property, and lived upon the common fund. We have read of the severe lives of poverty led by the Anchorites and many of the Saints of the early centuries of the Christian era, and by many also of succeeding centuries. Then the Church has her special adornment of poverty in the marvellous practice of that virtue by St. Francis, who styled poverty his queen. St. Ignatius wished poverty to be to his sons as a mother. Poverty is the distinguishing mark of nearly all the religious Orders in the Church; and the more closely these Orders cling to the practice of it, the greater vitality they manifest, and the better they maintain themselves in the fervour of their calling in the Church.

From our Lord's teaching we may gather how necessary poverty is to our perfection; for He said upon an occasion: 'If thou wilt be perfect, go sell what thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow Me' (St. Matt. xix. 21).

If we look for reasons why poverty should exercise

such influence upon religious perfection, we discover that it disengages the mind and affections from love of riches and possessions, and of worldly ease, comfort, and indulgence, and from one of the most potent factors in worldly greatness—all which things may easily become a great obstacle to our spiritual welfare. We discover that, whereas riches fill men with a spirit of attachment to the world, binding them to commerce, speculations, worldly enterprise, and worldly society, all which are more or less a hindrance to religiousness, poverty, on the other hand, disengages the heart from all this, tames the proud spirit of man, frees the mind from worldly care, and trains the character to self-denial; thus disposing man to virtue, and preparing the soul for the rich and special graces that are found in fervent religious life. We discover, too, that the state of voluntary poverty has this holy attraction, that it has been blessed by our Lord in a special way, both by His own choice of it, and by reason of the reward that He has promised to all who embrace it: 'Blessed are ye poor, for yours is the kingdom of God' (St. Luke vi. 20); 'Every one that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands for My Name's sake, shall receive a hundred-fold, and shall possess life everlasting' (St. Matt. xix. 29). No wonder is it that the desire of securing these incomparable blessings should have led so many to embrace voluntary poverty, and to cast in their lot with those who practise this evangelical counsel. This is the step that you also have taken; but if you have forsaken

all, it is to gain all. You may say, in the words of the psalm: 'The Lord is the portion of my inheritance . . . it is Thou that wilt restore my inheritance to me' (xv. 5).

Consider now briefly the nature of your obligations by reason of the vow of poverty.

By your vow you have taken a definite step under a solemn obligation of observing poverty during your whole life. Your vow of poverty makes it unlawful for you, by your own will and act, to dispose of any temporal thing of estimable value, as though you had the use or disposal of it independently of the will of your superior. What is chiefly contrary to your vow is, therefore, the arbitrary use and disposal of things. In order to deal with temporal goods without any breach of your vow, the permission of your rules or of your superior is necessary. The permission of your superior may, according to circumstances, be express, tacit, or presumed. Any act that would be of the nature of an act of proprietorship, dealing with things in your use as though they were absolutely your own, would be directly against the vow. The gravity of the sin would depend upon the value of the matter thus dealt with.

It may be well to instance a few cases in which the vow of poverty would be violated. But please bear in mind that there are cases in which, when unable at the moment to obtain express permission, it would be quite right to presume permission—for instance, if you were quite sure that the superior would give the permission.

You would violate the vow by receiving anything for yourself without your superior's knowledge or consent; by receiving in this way presents of even useful articles, or ornaments for your room, or books, or sums of money.*

The vow of poverty would also be violated by your giving away or alienating anything from your community, and by your borrowing or lending. To constitute a mortal sin in the cases of borrowing or lending, the matter or amount would require to be of much greater value than in the case of actually giving anything away.

The vow could also be violated by your acting contrary to the will of your superior, in administering the goods of your community; and by your causing or allowing loss by your culpably careless custody of such goods. The vow might also be violated by your ordering articles of clothing without the superior's permission; also by your keeping money without permission, even though not belonging to the community.

It is possible that sometimes religious use their own discretion first, and mention the matter only afterwards to their superior. They pretend that they may presume permission, when really there is not sufficient justification for so doing; and then, when it is too late for the superiors to exercise any

* In the cases of offences against the vow given by Lehmkuhl is included taking food when permission may not rightly be presumed: 'Comedere et bibere, non solum ex rebus monasterii, sed etiam apud amicum, sine licentia. —Lehm. Ed. XI. Vol. 1. No. 682, 2.

authority in the matter, they tell them what has been done. This manner of acting is not in keeping with the vow. It would also be contrary to the vow if you were to get externs to make purchases for you, and upon your authority, and only afterwards to arrange the matter with your superior.

To use money received for a certain purpose, for any other object than that purpose, or to expend upon the approved object more money than intended by the superiors, without first consulting them, would ordinarily be against your vow; unless the peculiar circumstances of the case warranted your presuming permission. You would also offend against poverty by taking upon yourselves any money risk or debt without due authorization.

Lastly, you might consider if there are any occasions when quite unnecessarily you spend too much money. This perhaps might occur when you have leave to make a journey, and even at other times when you are entrusted with money.

These cases are instanced only to illustrate the teaching of theologians concerning the vow, and not because any doubt exists as to your attachment to voluntary poverty, or as to your faithful fulfilment of its requirements.

It is evident that by your vow you have circumvented yourselves, and have given up to God your freedom in the use of this world's goods. I cannot suppose it possible that you regret the choice and the sacrifice which you have so generously made;

or that you wish to render it unreal; or that you would give an unlawful interpretation to the words of St. Paul: 'As having nothing, and possessing all things' (2 Cor. vi. 10). What, indeed, should be said of religious who would so plan everything as never to experience any inconvenience from their vow? What if religious were to collect into their rooms everything that could make them comfortable, and possibly much more commodious and comfortable than their rooms would have been elsewhere, if they had not embraced the state of religious poverty? What if they have superfluous clothing, and everything of the best? What if they ever seek permissions and exemptions, so as to escape from every little inconvenience or privation? What view should be taken of the matter if they surround themselves for their amusement with various kinds of expensive novelties, which will soon cease to be novelties, and will then be cast aside? And what if they be expensive in their habits, causing outlay that is uncalled for and that the community can ill afford? And, again, what if they complain that the diet is not good enough, even when everything is well provided? What an unreal thing the poverty of such religious would be!

Would there not be an unbecomingness in such conduct in religious vowed to God to observe poverty? Could such religious be said to love poverty? Could their superiors look approvingly upon such conduct, and would it not cause disedification? We ask, finally, would not these

religious do well to adopt a more perfect way of acting ?*

With these reflections before you, you should endeavour to dispose yourselves to observe your vow by filling your minds and hearts with the spirit of poverty—that is, with respect for, and love of, this sublime virtue. Strive to manifest your love of holy poverty by your great exactitude in its observance. Your love of poverty will appear in your dress, in your ways, and in your surroundings. Let the poverty of Christ manifest itself in you. Ask yourselves in what way, and how far, you show your love of it; and pray fervently for the grace to fulfil exactly all your obligations with regard to your vow.

Is it possible that any religious among you may thoughtlessly have fallen into ways, or adopted practices which, if not positively or notably opposed to the vow itself, may yet leave some room for doubt about it, or be at any rate contrary to the spirit of poverty ? You will not, however, content yourselves with stopping just within the limits of a breach of your vow—that would not betoken much love of the poverty of Christ; but you should also use discretion, and practise self-denial in your various expenses, and in supplying your many wants. Seek not only the reward of not having broken your

* Father Humphrey, S.J., in his work 'Elements of Religious Life' says: 'His vow is not only not to use goods without leave of his superior, but also to observe *the state of a poor man*, and not to make expenses which do not beseem poor men' (p. 133, First Edition).

vow, but also the recompense of having been careful and exact in observing it. Such will be your aim if you strive to walk in the steps of your Divine Lord, and of the many glorious Saints of the Church who have left you such an admirable example of their love of poverty. What room there is for generous action in this matter! Be assured that your observance of poverty is not only a question of poverty itself, but also a question of progress in religious perfection. Look upon it seriously in this light.

At the close of the retreat you will kneel once more before the altar to renew before our Blessed Lord your solemn obligations. Once more you will pronounce the words of your consecration to poverty. Your heart has been converted from all inordinate attachment to the dross of this world. Attachment of that kind leaves so many men wanting in true riches when they most need them—namely, at death. For, when they quit this world, they leave behind them all their worldly possessions, and only the priceless treasure of grace will secure for them the heavenly kingdom.

But you, following your holy vocation, have gone after other riches, the spiritual riches acquired by the practice of poverty; and God is your portion, and His kingdom is your inheritance. Be on your guard against any craving after this world's goods and comforts, and be prepared to experience various inconveniences and wants. Be devoted to what the vow and practice of poverty demand of you.

May God give you the grace of the true spirit of

your vocation, and enrich you with spiritual blessings; and may He finally reward your fidelity to poverty according to the Divine promise: 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.'

NOTE.—Canon 594, § 1, 3: 'In every religious Institute, all must carefully observe the common life, even in matters of food, clothing, and furniture.' 'The furniture of the religious must be in accordance with the poverty of which they make profession.'

IV.

SIN IN A RELIGIOUS.

'If My enemy had reviled Me, I would verily have borne it . . . but thou!'—Ps. liv. 13, 14.

The faith we prize so dearly teaches us that our Divine Lord came in His mercy into the world to be the Lamb of God, to take away the sins of the world. He Himself, of the very necessity of His Divine nature, was without sin, and He hated sin with that essential hatred which He could not but bear towards everything opposed to God's sovereignty and holiness.

If all God's servants are invited to embrace holiness of life, and to flee from sin as from the face of a serpent (Ecclus. xxi. 2), with what great urgency is not this demanded and expected of you who are consecrated to God, and who should therefore rejoice when He is glorified, and suffer when He meets with dishonour? You are, and you thank God for it, called away from the world to a condition conducing to greater holiness, and in which you are required ever to tend to perfection by the observance of your vows and rules. As your rule of life you have accepted and adopted a code of regulations that supposes on your part a special love of God, and a desire to serve Him faithfully in the religious state. The habit you wear should ever remind you that you

are consecrated to God, and it signifies this to all who see you.

In your call to the religious state, as well as since you entered it, you have received unequivocal tokens of God's love of you, and special providence in your regard; and you now see yourselves associated with the vast army of religious men and women spread over the Church of God, who have generously put on the armour of Christ to do battle with sin and with the Wicked One, and to offer up to God, as from many glorious choirs, an unceasing chant of fervent prayer and praise. How privileged, then, is your vocation! Does it not entail the obligation of living holily all your days? How lamentable it would be if religious were to disregard this strict obligation! This is what we are going to consider in this conference. Alas for human frailty! Even holy religious have at times fallen. It is not pretended that any of you have actually fallen into grievous sin; but the consideration of such a fall should fill you with a wholesome fear, and should also incite you to ardour in the pursuit of your sanctification.

The psalmist says: 'Man when he was in honour did not understand' (xlviii. 13). Religious fall from grace; and whereas they were called to edify the other members of the community, and to move the faithful to piety by their example, and even to win sinners to better ways by their prayers and good advice, lo! they themselves now need conversion. They were in honour, but they did not understand. What are the things which they seemingly have not understood? They have not understood God's love

of them, nor what return they owed; they have not rightly or fully understood the mystery of Calvary, and at what a price the grace, favour, and friendship of God have been obtained. They have not understood the exaltedness of their own condition, and what it demands of them; they have not understood the greatness of their guilt, the depth of their fall, and the extent of their spiritual loss and degradation. 'Man when he was in honour did not understand.' These religious have not understood the graces they have despised, the merits they have dissipated, and the punishment they have incurred. They have grieved the Holy Spirit, and wounded the Sacred Heart—even 'crucifying again to themselves the Son of God and making Him a mockery' (Heb. vi. 6). They have despised the love of Mary, and abandoned the company of all the blessed. Having sold their birthright for a mess of pottage, they have blotted heaven out of their vision. Our Lord said: 'Whosoever committeth sin, is the servant of sin' (St. John viii. 34). They have, therefore, turned into the broad road, and cast in their lot with the wicked; and by mortal sin they have gone over to the enemy, and become the victims of Satan (1 St. John iii. 8). God, therefore, Whose love was their richest treasure, having been driven forth, retires from them, saying: 'I have forsaken My house, I have left My inheritance, I have given My dear soul into the hand of her enemies' (Jer. xii. 7). 'Man when he was in honour did not understand.' Shall it ever be said of any of you that you have not understood?

No. You will not forget that you have been consecrated to God. The bonds that bind you to Him are the bonds of a special love and most devoted service. Nor will you forget how often you are privileged to enjoy the Eucharistic union. Has this made no impression upon you, that you come so often before the Blessed Sacrament, and assist daily at the Holy Mass? Alas, if you have not understood! Where is the holiness of life, where the zeal for the Divine honour, where the piety, where the sincere religiousness, that your calling demands and expects in you? What if you have neglected this zeal and piety? What if your soul be stained with mortal sin? for such neglect is likely, sooner or later, to lead to this fatal precipice. Oh, in such a case, what a dereliction of duty, what an abandonment of principle, what sad unfaithfulness, and what a disastrous calamity! Perhaps the evil will not be confined to the religious who fall, for they may even become as plague-spots in the community.

Conceive, if you can, a more lamentable fall. For who should be so devoted to God, so devout, and so ready to be sacrificed on the altar of divine charity, as the sworn servants of Christ? But what if they have committed mortal sin? 'If My enemy had reviled Me, I would verily have borne it . . . but thou!'

With what feelings of dismay should not such a spectacle inspire you, especially if, after a fall, it should lead to a second, and a third fall. But, worse than all, how lamentable would the case be if these falls were to lead to the crime of sacrilege. That

would, indeed, be wickedness of the most deplorable and inexcusable kind. Might we not regard mortal sin in such souls as the 'abomination of desolation in the holy place'?

Although these thoughts about the evil of mortal sin are put before you, it is not suggested that any religious among you need to consider them, except it be as a point of meditation, and to inspire their minds with a horror of mortal sin, and with a firm determination, by God's grace, to avoid every danger of falling into it. We speak of danger, because there is always danger, and it would be delusion to think otherwise. We know how sometimes we feel strong and resolute; but, alas! sometimes we are weak. The foe awaits his opportunity: are we always ready for him? We know, too, that we are exposed to be set upon by many enemies, and that we ourselves are, by nature, frail and prone to evil. A serious indiscretion, a neglect of precautions, a yielding to dangerous curiosity, human respect, the exposing of ourselves to fall, jealousy, envy, hatred, ambition, flattery—these, and many other causes and occasions, may lead to a fatal fall. 'He that loves the danger shall perish in it.' Your religious grace will not save you, if you wantonly expose yourselves to it.

Danger of one kind or another may arise from the power of your passions or proclivities, from shiftiness or sloth of character; it may meet you in the house or in the school, in the books you read or in the objects you see; it may surprise you in conversation or correspondence; it may arise from

immortification or curiosity, from the intrigues of friends or the snares of foes; it may beset you when alone or when in the crowd, in the broad daylight or in the night-time, when in recreation and even when at prayer. Man's life is truly a warfare; the life of religious is not free from some daily contest. Danger is on every side; it is to be found both within us and without us. Therefore does St. Paul warn all of us, saying: 'He that thinketh himself to stand, let him take heed lest he fall' (1 Cor. x. 12).

You have now considered the subject of mortal sin and the dangers of it sufficiently to put yourselves well on your guard against so great and fatal an evil. Direct your thoughts now to venial sin.

Although, thank God, you have not fallen into grievous sin, is it not possible that in other matters less grievous, yet of more or less serious consequence, you may have offended God? If human frailty has in any such way manifested itself in you, place yourselves face to face with it in this retreat.

If you have not sinned mortally, yet you have perhaps offended by some known deliberate venial sin, and this sin has been repeated, and you may even have committed it so frequently that it may be called your habitual sin, though only venial. Is it, alas! even possible that some of your conduct has been quite unworthy of your religious character and vocation, even though you have not fallen thereby into mortal sin?

You would do well to examine yourselves carefully on these two points. If you neglect to do this, it is to be feared you will not derive from the retreat

the benefit that is desired. For now, during these days of recollection, is the time in which, with a view to practical amendment, you should examine your shortcomings. Your love of God should move you to do this. Within the fleshy walls of your hearts there may be secret faultiness that renders you unworthy of your privileged vocation, or that impedes your attainment of the perfection to which God calls you; if it does not even threaten to lead you down the inclined plane of evil. Pierce, then, through those walls; search Jerusalem with lamps (Soph. i. 12), and strive to discover the faultiness and to correct it. This is certainly needed; for, if you rightly understand your duty, you will not only adopt all necessary measures to avoid sin, but you will also see what more you can do to please God, and to advance your sanctification.

Now let it be supposed that you have fallen into a careless way, and have committed perhaps many venial sins. In such a case, what is incumbent upon you? You should consider with all seriousness the evil of venial sin in itself, and in yourselves as religious; you should examine what you have to do in order to avoid those sins, taking care to note what are the causes of them; and, finally, you should make your good resolutions as to avoiding them, and what leads to their commission.

First of all, then, let us examine what venial sin is in itself, and in a religious.

It may be asked, 'Is venial sin so very serious?'

We know that after mortal sin, which means spiritual death, and incurs everlasting ruin and

punishment, venial sin, being an offence against God, but of lesser gravity, comes next in the order of evil. Venial sin wounds the soul, and lessens its spiritual ardour and energy; it merits severe chastisement; it delays our entry into heaven, and casts us into the prison of purgatory. These are some of the effects of venial sin; they should convince us of the evil that it is in itself. The souls in purgatory do not consider that venial sin is to be made light of.

But what is the guilt of it in religious? You can never reach a sufficiently high standard of holiness; you should be ever pressing forward; and you will never regret any care, labour, and self-denial that your efforts in this direction may cost you. But what if you fall into venial sins as often and as easily as many faulty secular persons do, perhaps even oftener than devout persons in the world do? How great the reproach that you would then deserve! 'If My enemy had reviled Me, I would verily have borne it . . . but thou . . . who didst take sweet meats together with Me!' Try to bring yourselves to understand how serious an evil deliberate venial sin is, especially in religious, who are called to a higher state of perfection. 'Man when he was in honour did not understand.' Do not religious know how great the miseries are which are consequent upon the commission of deliberate venial sin? Religious thereby offend and dishonour their loving Lord and Master; they stain their soul; they render themselves less ready and less active in corresponding with grace; they stay the flow of special graces; they encourage and strengthen their own

evil proclivities; they open the way to other failings; they lessen their piety and their effectiveness for good; they please the devil, and possibly they scandalize their neighbour; and they prove themselves ungrateful to God for all His benefits. How little we are able to do for God in return for all His goodness to us! The very least we should strive to do is to avoid every form of deliberate offence against Him. 'Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord.'

Let us now, secondly, examine what should be done to avoid venial sin. As good religious, should you not wish everything to be done that should be done? I am not laying stress on ordinary sins of frailty, but on those that are more wilful.

One of the happy results of your retreat should be that you will be resolved to try to avoid deliberate venial sin. In order to comply with this good resolution, it is most important to determine the steps to be taken. You should wish to lay the axe to the root — that is, to remove the causes of your falls.

If you fall deliberately into venial sin, it may arise from such causes as the following: dissipation of mind, or omission of your meditation, of self-examination, and of devout prayer. It may come of not keeping yourselves under religious control, or of breaking through the restraints wisely imposed upon you by your holy rules. It may come of associating too much with worldly persons, or of speaking at random, without weighing the propriety of what you are about to say. It may come of your enter-

taining dislikes and animosities; or it may arise from your falling from fervour, and exposing yourselves recklessly to danger. It may come of your unwise curiosity or of your not watching over your senses; or it may arise from conceit or a vain self-confidence. And lastly, it may sometimes result from a false conscience, foolishly leading you to think that what would be wrong in another, will not, for one reason or another, be wrong in you; or causing you to imagine that circumstances justify you in neglecting some duty, or in doing what, under ordinary circumstances, would certainly be wrong. You must correct your conscience; the guide of your conduct must be an enlightened conscience. Conscience must not be made subservient to your wayward will, but your wayward will must be controlled and directed by an enlightened conscience. You should, then, be on your guard against these dangers.

In the third place, endeavour to conceive becoming sorrow for any deliberate venial sins into which you may have persistently fallen. If you recognize God's claims upon your love and upon practical proofs of it, you will repent of them, and resolve to amend.

If, then, by the aid of God's light and grace, you discover that you have become lax, and through falling from fervour have got into a groove of faultiness, and not thought sufficiently of the spiritual loss resulting from this, and have even committed some particular venial sins frequently, what will you now do? You will sincerely repent of this, and you will detest any persistence in such unworthy conduct.

It is true that venial sins will not excite in you the

intense sorrow and abhorrence that mortal sins would; but, seeing that happily you do not fall into mortal sin, it is just possible that your lives might be passed without any deep contrition, if you do not excite yourselves to sorrow for the sins that you do actually commit. Strive also to conceive this sorrow, because greater sanctity is demanded of you than usually of secular persons; and the persistent commission of only venial sin by Christ's special friends should be to them matter of sincere regret: 'If My enemy had reviled Me, I would verily have borne it . . . but thou!'

God grant that you may understand ever more and more what holiness of life your privileged vocation demands of you, and that you may earnestly strive to attain it. May your hearts be ever filled with sincere and lasting hatred of every form of evil, and with love and desire of all that is good, wise, and profitable to you; that at all times you may please God, and spread around you the good odour of edification and piety. Holy David says: 'You that love the Lord, hate evil' (Ps. xcvi. 10). Take this appeal as addressed to you, for you surely love God. O religious of God's Church, O devout servants of God, who love Him, hate evil; conceive a detestation of it and shun it. Every offence against God, though only deliberate venial sin, is an evil. Yes, you do and will hate every form of evil. Now is the time for generous resolutions. Too often have you offended, too long have you been remiss; but now you are banded together in religion as true and faithful servants of your Lord. You will grieve over

your past infidelities, and seek pardon for them; for now is the time of grace, mercy, and amendment.

And now we draw our considerations to a conclusion.

If you have had the misfortune, through human frailty, to fall persistently into deliberate sin, trust in the divine mercy for forgiveness; do not make light of your offence, but pray with David: 'Wash me yet more from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.' Cast out the abomination of desolation from the holy place. Turn with confidence and renewed fidelity to the Sacred Heart of your compassionate Lord, even as to the well of infinite mercy, and as to the fountain of living water—to be pardoned, cleansed, and purified. Conceive also a great desire of amendment, and of living hereafter as far as possible without offence. 'Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God.' They see God in this world, and God communicates Himself to them in ways of which the wicked and indifferent have no experience. They enjoy a taste of the unction of joy and gladness, of which David sang: 'Thou hast loved justice, and hatedst iniquity: therefore, God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows' (Ps. xliv. 8). May this sweet and consoling unction, accorded to innocence of life, be merited by you and all true servants of Christ our Lord, and may it be to you a foretaste of the fuller, sweeter, and more lasting joys reserved for all the just in the kingdom of heaven!

SECOND DAY.

V.

MEDITATION.

'Make the way known to me wherein I should walk: for I have lifted up my soul to Thee.'—Ps. cxlii. 8.

You are required by your holy rules to devote a certain amount of time every day to meditation. What a privileged occupation this is, and how beneficial to your spiritual advancement! How shall we enumerate the many benefits resulting from meditation? Some of these benefits are the clearer knowledge of God, of His perfections, of His dealings with you, of our Lord's work and designs in the Incarnation and Redemption, of the lessons of His sacred life and passion, of His virtues and doctrine, of His generous provision in the Church for your sanctification and salvation, and the clearer knowledge of the character of your calling, of your duties, of the way of perfection, of the value of grace, of the beneficial use of the Holy Sacraments, and of the many means provided to assist your souls on their journey to eternity. Then, besides the light of all such excellent knowledge, what support, encouragement, consolation, and devotedness the various

subjects of your meditations afford or inspire! In mental prayer you commune in a reverential but familiar manner with God; you lift up your soul to Him; you ask Him, as David did, to make known to you the way wherein you should walk; and you also supplicate Him to bestow upon you the graces needed to enable you to act up to the lessons that are suggested to you in your prayer. What more important subjects for consideration can be imagined than those that are the matter of your meditations? Do not, then, begrudge the time; do not spend it listlessly. The time is not deemed misspent which the author, the artist, the mechanic, the scientist, and the merchant spend in cogitating over their undertakings, their speculations, or their pursuits, and in devising the ways and means necessary for their accomplishment. Will you, then, deem the time wasted in which you are invited to see how you may better serve God, advance in virtue, accomplish the ends of your holy vocation, advance your sanctification, and secure your everlasting salvation?

If the prophet Jeremias attributed the wickedness of the Jewish people to their neglect of serious thought—'With desolation is all the land made desolate, because there is none that considereth in the heart' (Jer. xii. 11)—it should not be held an exaggeration to refer to the neglect of meditation the falling away of religious from the grace of their holy state. It is not religious who make their morning meditation seriously, piously, and assiduously who fall away from fervour, who commit mortal sin, who scandalize their community by

remissness and unreligious conduct, and who neglect the duties of their state; but religious who act in this unworthy manner will be found to be those who fail to make their morning meditation, or who make it without interest or fruit. Being called to a state in which you should ever tend to perfection; holding, as you do, special relations with our Lord; invited to attain a high degree of virtue, and ever engaged in pious works—you cannot sustain your spiritual life on only such ordinary and scanty food as might nourish persons in the world following a secular vocation. No; your spiritual nourishment should be richer and more abundant, and it should be partaken of more frequently; otherwise it is to be feared you may become impoverished in religious thought and sentiment, and you may degenerate and lose much of the fruit of your first years in religion, becoming mechanical in action, and weaker instruments for doing good. The fear of such falling away should keep you from joining the ranks of religious who begin the day with a neglect of duty, omitting their morning meditation, and thus losing graces that God holds out to them.

Do not allow yourselves to take an erroneous view of the matter, or allow sloth or indifference to lead you into neglect. A few vocal prayers, particularly if said in a routinal and perhaps hurried manner, are not sufficient to feed generously the lamp of the piety demanded in your state of life—a lamp that should burn with such brilliancy before the face of your Divine Lord; nor are they sufficient satisfactorily to irrigate the garden of the religious

soul that should blossom with the choicest flowers of Christian virtue; nor will they freely carry the rich sap of the vine into branches that should yield the abundant and delicious fruit expected by the Divine Master of the vineyard. No; you must also be faithful to your meditation; and if you would meditate well and profitably, you must love and appreciate meditation. If King David, bearing all the cares and anxieties of a kingdom in troublous times, yet deemed it a duty to give himself to daily meditation, what a reproach his conduct should be to you if, away as you are from the turmoil of the world and professing at the same time to pursue the way of perfection, you should yet seek to dispense yourselves from an exercise that cannot be systematically omitted by religious without detriment to their spiritual well-being! No; you will take for your model Mary, the blessed Mother of our Saviour, who pondered on the life, virtues, and words of her Son (St. Luke ii. 19 and 51), treasuring His sayings in her heart; and, like that other Mary, the sister of Martha, you will cast yourselves in spirit at the feet of your Divine Master to hear what He will say to you, and to learn the teachings of true wisdom (St. Luke x. 39).

We come now to examine what happy results may be expected from meditation, provided only that it be made assiduously and piously.

Let us review what has already been said in a somewhat summary way. Meditation will raise you to a higher and fuller knowledge of God, of divine mysteries, of God's love and of His dealings with

you; also, of the mission, example, and teaching of our Divine Lord. Meditation will assist you to act with reflection; it will give you an insight, not only into the inner life of our Lord, His holy Mother, and the Saints, so as to impress its teaching upon you in a practical way; but it will also give you an insight into religious truths generally and a comprehensive view of them, enabling you to realize the effects they should produce in your own life and conduct. Meditation will, further, give you a fuller knowledge of the blessedness of your holy calling, of the perfection demanded of you, of the duties of your state of life, and of the virtues you are called upon to practise. It will, moreover, help you to obtain a clearer knowledge of yourselves and of your faults; finally, it will, as it were, impregnate you with religious thought.

How very desirable all this knowledge is! St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians (1 Cor. xii. 1): 'Now concerning spiritual things, I would not have you ignorant.' Religious should not be uninstructed in spiritual things, therefore they should not neglect meditation.

We will here ask what is the bearing of meditation upon the knowledge of spiritual things? It makes this knowledge thorough; for it brings the mind to focus itself upon various truths and lessons in succession; it draws abundant matter out of the subjects upon which it concentrates itself, since it considers them leisurely and carefully from every point of view. Religious, therefore, who exercise themselves piously and assiduously in daily medita-

tion, will not have only superficial knowledge in spiritual matters, they must necessarily acquire gradually very clear and copious information about them. Reflect, too, that it is God Himself Who teaches and enlightens you through meditation; for meditation is not simply a ruminating upon religious topics, it is a form of prayer in which petition or impetration—either by vocal extempore prayer or by the desires of your heart raised up to God—is a very important part. It is in the prayer of meditation that you approach God to receive enlightenment, and you do not appeal to Him in vain: 'Come ye to Him,' sang holy David, 'and be enlightened' (Ps. xxxiii. 6); 'In Thy light we shall see light' (Ps. xxxv. 10). And our Lord promised, saying: 'Everyone that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth' (St. Matt. vii. 8).

Meditation is not, however, only an application of the mind. It is true that, in the body of the prayer, reflection and examination of the subject occupy the first place in point of order and time, for they are intended to let in the light of truth into the soul; but they are immediately followed by the eliciting of affections corresponding with the impressions that these truths have produced upon your minds. These affections are of the purest and most religious character, causing you to give God praise and becoming worship, by adoration, admiration, love, thanksgiving, joy, respectful sympathy, desire, or regret. These affections, excited by the subject under consideration, are usually of a more lively, impressive, and durable kind than such as are

produced by external devout practices; and they are, at the same time, less emotional; for meditation will give greater solidity to your piety.

In the first part of your mental prayer it is God Who speaks to you; and in the second, it is you who speak to God, as it were in response, by the emotions and affections of your heart. It is then that you, in your turn, appreciate God's goodness and love; and the wings of your desires bear you up to God, and to better things in the direction of the perfection that He requires of you. Thus your meditation begins to have its practical bearing upon your character and conduct.

Having given vent to your affections, you proceed next, under the inspiration of the knowledge received and still fresh in your minds, and under the impulse of the affections and desires just elicited—you proceed next, I say, to turn your glance upon yourselves, with a view to applying the lessons learned, to examine your conduct, to regret and beg pardon for your shortcomings, and to make then your good resolutions for the future. You will add fervent prayer, to beseech God to give you the graces you need, and you will beseech also the help of the intercession of our Blessed Lady, St. Joseph, and your holy patrons in the same behalf.

Conceive, if you can, the wonderful benefit that daily meditation properly made must procure for your souls, and its holy influence upon your lives.

According to St. Augustine, prayer protects him who prays, it exasperates the enemy, it consoles the Angels, and it is a pleasing sacrifice to God. Accord-

ing to St. Jerome, he who neglects prayer enters into temptation.

We are told in the Acts of the Apostles what value the holy Apostles set upon prayer. Although, as is piously believed, they were confirmed in grace, they yet would not trust themselves without prayer. When the number of the disciples had increased, and the care of so many became an obstacle to their application to prayer, the Apostles ordained deacons who should attend to the needs of the faithful, saying: 'But we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word' (Acts vi. 4). You then, with many important duties to fulfil, yet struggling with many weaknesses, liable to so many imperfections, and perhaps subject also to various faults of character, cannot assuredly afford to dispense yourselves from this important exercise of the religious life. Our Lord said: 'Man liveth not by bread alone, but by every word which proceedeth from the mouth of God.' It is in meditation that you masticate this desirable word, and pass it into your souls, so that it may prove to you the very food of knowledge and the sustenance of virtue.

Come now to picture to yourselves the life or manner of acting of religious who neglect meditation.

It is quite possible that they may not wish their superiors or the other members of the community to know that they do not make their morning meditation. In order to conceal this omission of so important a duty, they may have to adopt certain pretences, or practise some deception. They will

therefore descend to these unworthy measures. It is needless to say—and it is well to be persuaded of it—all pretences, deceptions, and make-believes, in this as in other such cases, do not as a matter of fact yield the desired result, although others, influenced by charity, may not call attention to the deception. But, passing on from the possibility of these religious employing such ruses with a view to conceal their omission, consider the results that will probably proceed from their neglect of meditation.

They are likely to have a distracted or dissipated mind, and as a consequence they may perform their spiritual exercises, and even hear Holy Mass, in a routinal way with an absence of profitable piety. Allowing, as we may do, for the manifestation of some pleasing sentiment produced by circumstances, or resulting from their natural character, there will be a certain amount of only mechanical action in performing the works of charity and other duties of their Institute. They will ordinarily be disposed to dissipation; and they may even come eventually to suffer such a loss of spirituality as to deprive themselves of much merit, and to leave themselves weak and a prey to even serious failings in religious virtue. Such religious are found at times not to possess their souls in patience, but to be easily affected by suffering, disappointment, opposition, anxiety, and by trying circumstances of every kind. They may be good-natured, and on that account they may be esteemed; but they will not be spiritual, and they will therefore be often unfaithful to grace, and they will experience but little devotion. They

may, indeed, remain apparently always in the same groove—an unsatisfactory groove it is—but we are told that not to go forward is really to be carried backward. These religious will easily tire of community observance; they will be fond of talking and gossiping, and eager for news; and, for the most part, they will fail to act from supernatural and therefore meritorious motives.

Finally, there is another possibility, akin to that with which we began our surmises concerning religious who neglect meditation. It is this: they will probably keep up a certain appearance of religiousness, but with what object? To stand well with others, to gain favour with superiors, and sometimes with the hope of being advanced to a desired position, or of retaining the one they hold. Such conduct is lamentable in religious. Ah, if fervent meditation can change it, should these religious hesitate to apply this efficacious remedy?

We will now pass from this really distressing picture. If unhappily there should be any among you who do not duly appreciate meditation and who are not faithful in fulfilling that important duty, God grant that they may come to see the danger arising from their neglect. Passing on, let us see what are likely to be the lives of religious who make their meditation regularly and conscientiously.

The fruits of their dutifulness and of their prayer will be seen in various ways. They will be devoutly prepared to assist with piety and spiritual profit at the Holy Mass, and to receive Holy Communion every day when possible. They will usually be

devout, and they will love prayer. Consequently their conduct will be a source of edification to the members of their community, and to the secular persons with whom they come in contact; and they will be esteemed by all for whom they labour. They will be patient under trials, and they will embrace dutifully God's dispensations. They will also be exact in fulfilling their duties. They will keep a good conscience, and keenly regret any failings, and will avoid idleness and dissipation. To them the yoke of religion will be sweet and its burden light; for they will love the religious life and its practices. They will be among those who are said to run in the holy path of God's commandments.

Such religious are the good and faithful servants ever ready for their Lord's coming. To them meditation is not irksome, because they appreciate its value, and desire its fruits. They will not easily excuse themselves from making their morning meditation.

Let us now ask under what plea religious neglect this duty. Their Institute demands that they fulfil it. Are they prevented because they are doing something else more pleasing to God? Are they more profitably engaged? The first religious of your holy Institute would not dream of omitting their meditation; and are not your superiors and so many exemplary members most faithful in this important observance? How is it, then, that any can afford to neglect it? When St. Teresa ceased to practise mental prayer and used only vocal prayers, she was forced to admit the error of this infidelity. Her own words are these: 'This was the

greatest and worst temptation that I ever had; for by this means I ran headlong to my own ruin.' She looked upon prayer as the gate through which God comes to us, and we pass to arrive at His love. 'I do not see,' she said, 'how God can come to us, or enrich us with His graces, if we shut the door against Him.'

You are now in retreat with the object of renewing yourselves in the spirit of your mind (Eph. iv. 23), of taking up with fresh fervour every portion of your duties, and of correcting your shortcomings. May God inspire you with a true love and appreciation of mental prayer, a practice without which there cannot be fervent religious life. Let your petition to Him be in the words of holy David: 'Make the way known to me wherein I should walk; for I have lifted up my soul to Thee.' God expects you to practise meditation; through it He enlightens and directs you, increases your virtue and grace, and fits you ever more and more for the duties that He has entrusted to you. Resolve, then, as you value your sanctification, to be ever faithful to it: it may not be omitted by religious without spiritual detriment. Do not refuse to God this loving homage; do not rob your own souls of this desirable nourishment. You do not neglect to take food for your body, and you are careful to see that it is good and suitable; be then at least as careful about the food for your mind and soul. The soul of the religious who is faithful to meditation is not as the stunted shrub in the hard sterile ground; but it is as the 'tree which is planted near the running waters which shall bring forth its fruit in due season; and his leaf shall not fall off' (Ps. i. 3).

VI.

HOLY CHASTITY.

'O how beautiful is the chaste generation with glory!'—WISD. iv. 1.

WHEN making your spiritual reading you would do well from time to time, but not often, to select the chapters that treat of the most excellent virtue of chastity. Such reading will tend to inspire you with love of this virtue, while it will also supply you with helpful warnings and guidance. As you are vowed to observe it, some remarks are called for during your retreat to point out what is demanded in exterior conduct by all who are under vow to observe chastity.

You have no doubt embraced the religious life with the special object of living a chaste life under the holy shelter of religion, fortified in your intention by the consecration of your chastity to God by vow. In this way you have followed the movement of a choice grace, leading you to love this exalted virtue, and to adopt a kind of life in which it would be fostered and protected. Perhaps, also, the grace of this vocation has been a reward for your devotion to the Blessed Virgin; for this devotion is conducive to piety and purity. Who shall say how many devout clients of Mary have, through her inter-

cession, been gifted with a strong love of holy chastity, which is a consoling token of predestination? (Ps. xliv. 15.)

We may study the lessons given by St. Paul, who tells us that 'everyone hath his proper gift from God' (1 Cor. vii. 7). These words point out that your calling comes from God, and that you should therefore respect its obligations under responsibility to God Who imposes them. The Apostle goes on to recommend chastity; for he says: 'I say to the unmarried . . . it is good for them if they so continue even as I' (vv. 8, 26, 40); for then they are solicitous for the things that belong to the Lord, how they may please God. To his recommendation we may add the praise given to chastity by the holy writer: 'O how beautiful is the chaste generation with glory!'

Good religious, who realize the preciousness and strengthening quality of this most delicate virtue, wish to preserve it ever in unsulliedness and freshness. In so preserving it, there must not be any unguardedness or any half-measures; for, by a deliberate and lasting vow made to God Himself, they have undertaken to observe chastity. To be chaste demands purity of mind and heart, as well as purity in exterior conduct. St. Paul's words: 'We have this treasure in earthen vessels' (2 Cor. iv. 7), may aptly be applied to the treasure of holy chastity. Consecrated as you now are by vow to God, you have renounced and closed your mind and heart against delectation in any deliberate unchaste thought or desire, or in any improper affection; and

you are required to put a guard over your senses, so as to forbid the approach of anything dangerous to the holy virtue through those avenues of the soul. You have taken as the beloved of your souls Christ our Lord; so that this is truly a divine alliance. Your chastity being thus consecrated upon the highest and most sacred altar, you hope that your sacrifice has been accepted by the Most High in the odour of sweetness.

What are now your dispositions with regard to your vow and the obligations it entails upon you? You should be determined to observe it with the most exact fidelity. You will keep yourselves from every compromise, and from every shadow of voluntary fault against it; consequently you will avoid every danger that any circumstance, place, or person might create in regard of it. Although temptation of one kind or another may arise from time to time—if not frequently as happened to some of the Saints—you will offer a firm and continual resistance. This will not be all; for you will, moreover, employ every means, especially devotion to the Most Holy Sacrament and Holy Communion, and tender piety towards our Blessed and Immaculate Mother, to foster this transcendent virtue of holy chastity.

These are certainly admirable resolutions to take, and it is to be hoped that you will not fall short in fulfilling them. You may ask if you really need to do all these things in order to observe chastity. Yes; you may not strike off any of these good resolutions as unnecessary if you are determined to

preserve your chastity unsullied by any deliberate fault. Any religious who have had the misfortune to fail in regard of their vow, owe it to their having failed to do some of the things included in these resolutions.

Consider now what these resolutions require you to do.

First of all, there must be a guard placed to keep danger from you. The citadel must be protected by ramparts; the guard must be ever on the watch; the soldiers must wear their armour and keep their weapons in their hands: then there will be a sense of security. In regard of the holy virtue, religious who are firm in their piety, and assiduous in fulfilling their duties, will be well fortified against the enemy. Over the mind you should place a spirit of recollection, a wariness against the approach of evil, and a constant union with God. Over the heart you should place the seal of piety and love of duty. Over your senses, especially over the eyes, a watch of guardedness, and over your whole demeanour a general garb of modesty and reserve. This will be as your shield.

It is not enough to hold yourselves in readiness to resist your foe and to be fortified against danger: in the second place, you must carefully avoid going voluntarily into danger. Such is human frailty in this matter that it is better to appear cowardly than bold, and wiser to avoid the enemy than to engage him. What the holy writer says may easily come to pass: 'He that loveth danger shall perish in it' (Ecclus. iii. 27). The ways of danger are often

covered like a snare; a profitless curiosity often leads the unwary from the safe path. By how little some get entangled, but how great fully is their fall; 'as if,' says Solomon, 'a bird should make haste to the snare, and knoweth not that his life is in danger' (Prov. vii. 23). I will not attempt to particularize the dangers which you should avoid, beyond saying: Be careful as to what you read, as to what you wish to know, as to circumstances or places where you might meet with temptation, and, finally, as to friendships that are termed particular, and those that arise from admiration or flattery. Impress upon your minds the fact that if you court danger you court defeat.

And now, in the third place, you have to consider what your conduct should be when your enemy actually assails you. You would wish to be spared this kind of trial; it is a very keen, sore, and humiliating one. You must combat valiantly in defence and protection of so precious a treasure; you may be robbed of it even by interior consent of the will to an unchaste suggestion. What, then, must you do? You must deal promptly and resolutely with every such evil thought and imagination; and you must guard yourselves against inordinate, tender, and therefore dangerous affections. Happily you are spared many of the dangers that society presents to the unwary, and usually you are respected even by the enemies of religion, and much more so by Catholics. But if, notwithstanding all this, some unexpected circumstance of danger should present itself, fly from it promptly, guard your eyes from

unwariness, and use the shield and the weapon of prayer. The lives of some of the Saints afford striking examples of their triumph over danger, and of their perseverance in dealing with offensive thoughts, imaginations, and suggestions, when our Lord has permitted them to be afflicted by this kind of trial. Let me mention one instance, that you may take courage by recognizing that the arising of evil imaginations is not a sign of depravity, but that it is one of the forms of trial from which the greatest Saints have not been spared. We read in the life of St. Catherine of Siena that her imagination was often filled with offensive representations, and that she even seemed sometimes on the very point of taking pleasure in them; but by the help of fervent prayer, humility, resignation, and confidence in God, she always gained the victory over them. On one such occasion, after a long and violent conflict, our Lord deigned to visit her; and she said to Him: 'Where wast Thou, my Divine Spouse, whilst I lay in such an abandoned, frightful condition?' 'I was with thee,' He seemed to reply. 'What?' she exclaimed, 'amidst the abominations with which my soul was infested!' Then He answered: 'They were displeasing and most painful to thee; the conflict, therefore, gained for thee merit, and the victory over them was due to My presence.'

The resolutions which should be taken require you, lastly, to cultivate and foster the holy virtue. But how is this to be done? You will do it by fervent prayer, and by zeal for spiritual advancement; for the more spiritual you become, the more

lustrous and beautiful should your chastity be; it thrives in the garden of piety, but languishes and even perishes outside it. I need not appeal to you to love it; if you love it, you will cherish it. But poor human nature is weak and prone to evil; receive then the Bread of the strong. You foster the holy virtue especially by receiving Holy Communion with great interior devotion. The Blessed Eucharist is 'the corn of the elect, and wine springing forth virgins' (Zach. ix. 17). You foster it also by devotion to the Blessed Virgin, and by constant recourse to her powerful intercession. You foster it, finally, by the mortification of your senses and of your appetite.

'How beautiful is the chaste generation with glory!' How dear to our Lord was the spotless purity of Mary! 'Thou art all fair.' How pleasing to Him was also the chastity of St. Joseph, of St. John, of St. Martha, and of so many other Saints! How agreeable to Him will all religious be who observe sacredly their holy vow of chastity!

In what holy society and association it places you! You are associated by it with saintly pontiffs and holy priests and religious, and with devout nuns of so many Institutes who all have vowed their virginity to God.

What nobility there is in chastity! How pure should be the flame ever burning in your religious chaste hearts! How this virtue disposes you for choice graces, and imparts an attraction towards all that is good and holy, while it also detaches affection from what is worldly and unworthy! It should

therefore prove a great help to you to practise other virtues, and to maintain you in innocence of life. Then, how richly and specially it will be rewarded! What a happy privilege will be yours in the realms of heavenly bliss to 'follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth' (Apoc. xiv. 4), with a distinguishing aureole of glory.

You have seen how guarded you must be, what precautions you should take, how strenuously you should protect the great treasure, and with what piety you should foster it. Let me add that these measures will not be employed assiduously and constantly if you do not prize and love the holy virtue. The careless, unwary, and imprudent expose themselves to fall more or less seriously.

Someone has said that 'fools rush in where angels fear to tread.' This saying may have its application in the case of religious who, by association or secret correspondence, or in other ways, run any hazard prejudicial to their vow. In some spiritual books we find whole chapters about religious being too fond of receiving or paying visits, and about the danger of remaining too long in the parlour. There may have been abuses in certain communities; affections may have been encouraged that appeared innocent, but that were unseemly in religious; and admiration and appreciation of virtue and good works may have developed into admiration that was too personal. Finally, little presents may have been given and received; perhaps photographs were exchanged; and the visits may have been wished for and looked forward to.

Are we to suppose that all this was laudable? Were the religious—in some way not conceived by ordinary mortals—acting in the true spirit of their vocation and its obligations? Was their conduct meritorious in God's sight, edifying to their community, and beneficial to their own souls? Apart from a lamentable waste of time, and a possible neglect of duty, and most probably a breach of rule in various ways, might there not have been in such conduct an exposure to danger with regard to the holy virtue? This sublime virtue of chastity is of so delicate and pure a nature, that more than ordinary precautions are needed to preserve it from being sullied. Indeed, the only safe rule that can be laid down for you, in order to maintain its purity and freshness, is to require you to be most circumspect, wary, prudent, and strict in all your conduct. Your love of this virtue, and your care in preserving it, should leave nothing to be desired.

No one would venture to call in question your great love of it, and your desire to be faithful in preserving it all-unsullied; but from what we have seen, you will understand that even the most holy and most advanced in religious virtue may not neglect any precautions necessary for safeguarding it, or expose themselves voluntarily or unnecessarily to any danger.

Do you not know how insidiously temptation may present itself? how a thought, from which all evil is absent, may suddenly develop into a bad thought, one to be rejected on the instant, and also how an affection, at first quite innocent, may become too

natural, and then even actually dangerous? Being religious vowed to chastity, you know that you would do wrong to find place in your minds and hearts for dangerous thoughts or affections. Having by vow and profession consecrated yourselves to God, have you not drawn for yourselves a certain line that should separate you from what is dangerous to holy chastity in the worldly associations? And do you not, therefore, hold yourselves bound to watch carefully over yourselves lest you should prove in any way unfaithful to your obligations, or offer your Lord and Master a divided affection?

Although your consecration is so holy, you will not yet be altogether free from temptations. You know that the enemy will make his onslaught and employ his wiles. He will strive to introduce the poison into your hearts, but he will conceal its virulence and disastrous effects. He would like to lead you to entertain the unchaste thought, to say the ill-judged word, or to take the dangerous step; but be on your guard, 'watch and pray' (St. Matt. xxvi. 41), for he will cover the snare and use some delusion. He will endeavour to cause you to fall first, and will then leave you to discover afterwards your mistake and your misfortune. Better far is the bold assault, the horrid open temptation, than the covered pitfall, the charming delusion. May God help you, I say; may He always enable you to discern the danger in time, and may He preserve you from the smallest voluntary fault!

Happily, in your exterior conduct, while not discarding the gentleness of manner and kindliness

of expression that become religious and win for you respect and esteem, you are taught to act with the reserve and decorum that give a pure tone to your own minds, and inspire others with a due sense of the holiness of your calling. If you were to dispense with this prudent reserve, you would thereby remove some of the outer bulwarks, and render the citadel less secure. Remember, too, that when the temptation does arise—while the assault of Satan comes, as it were, from without—so weak and vitiated is poor fallen human nature, that you may say you have a traitor within. So you may consider as addressed to yourselves the warning of Holy Scripture: 'He that thinketh himself to stand, let him take heed lest he fall' (1 Cor. x. 12). Therefore mistrust yourselves, and in every way be particular and cautious. If you avoid all unnecessary danger, you have One Whom you may trust. You may feel confident that our Lord, to Whom you have consecrated yourselves, will shield you with special graces, and lead you safe along the beautiful path that He calls you to follow, one that, under His call and for love of Him, you have chosen. But be prudent, strict, and watchful, for chastity is as a most delicate flower; its whiteness and purity are easily sullied, and its tender fibres are easily injured. Moreover, the rude impressions it may suffer are with difficulty, if ever, entirely removed; they may manifest themselves from time to time until the end of your lives.

Need you be reminded that God most rightly is a jealous God? (Exod. xx. 5). He deigns to prize

the consecration that you have made of yourselves to Him, and any breach of the vow is more than an ordinary sin—it bears the character of sacrilege. Jesus Christ Himself has now a more than ordinary claim to your love and devotedness. He has, as it were, said to every one among you: 'I will espouse thee to Me for ever' (Osee ii. 19). What a privilege is this! How highly you should esteem it, and how happy it should make you! You will not on any account set Him aside, so as to take pleasure rather in any inordinate affection towards creatures. No; nothing will induce you to forgo your happy and honourable privilege. Let, therefore, every thought or suggestion be instantly dismissed that would deprive you of your place in the Sacred Heart of your Lord.

What need is there to pursue this topic and dwell upon it? The only object is to impress you more and more with an earnest and loving appreciation of the holy vow itself, and of your happiness in having by it consecrated yourselves to God. This appreciation should strengthen your dutiful affection for the holy virtue of chastity; so that if any rude trial should arise, you may be filled with the pure sentiments of the countless Saints who, like you, were vowed to chastity, and in whose footsteps it is your privilege to follow. 'O how beautiful is the chaste generation with glory: for the memory thereof is immortal: because it is known both with God and with men. When it is present they imitate it: and they desire it when it hath withdrawn itself, and it triumpheth crowned for ever, winning the reward

of undefiled conflicts' (Wisd. iv. 1, 2). With the chaste our Lord will hold sweet commune, and for them are prepared triumph and heavenly crowns. Religious should be comforted by the conviction that the more perfect is their devotedness to chastity, the easier will it be for them to walk in the path of fervour and piety, and the more abundant fruit will they derive from Holy Communion and prayer.

When you renew your vow of chastity, do it with renewed esteem and fervour. In the meantime, examine and see if you need in any way to further wall in, or more securely safeguard, this delicate lily of the religious garden.

With renewed fidelity consecrate your chastity to the Sacred and most Pure Heart of our Lord, and place it anew under the safe guardianship of His Immaculate Mother. Pray, finally, for even a greater esteem of this precious virtue, and for the grace to preserve it ever bright and intact; so that, in the kingdom of everlasting joys, you may be privileged to be associated with the virgins who sing the new Canticle before the throne, and 'follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth' (Apoc. xiv. 4).

VII.

NEGLECT.

'My vineyard I have not kept.'—CANT. i. 5.

WE cannot but acknowledge that among the causes of evil and the beginnings of sad fallings away, neglect holds a prominent place. Take away neglect of grace, neglect of duty, neglect of means, neglect of precautions, and neglect of opportunities, and you remove the sad cause of much moral deterioration, evil courses, and spiritual ruin. We are told in the Gospel narrative that before those men who were invited to the marriage-feast of the King's son were passed by, under the anger of the King, 'they neglected' (St. Matt. xxii. 5) to respond to the gracious invitation. So, when seculars begin to neglect the pious practices of their youth, to omit their usual prayers, to discontinue the frequentation of the holy sacraments, to keep away from sermons, and in other ways both to neglect the means of their sanctification and to remove the safeguards of their virtue, there is ample reason for apprehension. For neglect of this kind, which is really very serious, is followed by neglect of graver obligations; and that is then realized which is said in Ecclesiasticus: 'He that contemneth small things, shall fall little by little' (xix. 1).

You may have heard of cases in which neglect such as we have portrayed has occurred, and has led to some sad falling away. Would it not be well, in this retreat, to examine if neglect in some degree may have crept into your own manner of life? Do not, however, begin the examination with a conviction that there is little or no occasion for it; but rather with an apprehension that very possibly you have been guilty of neglect in various ways, without having perhaps dwelt seriously upon the consequences. Why! Saints have written to Saints to warn them against neglect. Thus we find St. Paul writing to St. Timothy in these words: 'Neglect not the grace that is in thee . . . meditate upon these things . . . take heed to thyself' (1 Tim. iv. 14–16). St. Bernard wrote to Pope Eugenius: 'In vain do you exert yourself about other matters, if you neglect yourself. Of what avail will it be to save the whole world if, all the rest being gained, you lose yourself?' St. Bernard counsels him, therefore, to begin by considering himself and his own needs.

You would do well to impress upon yourselves the evil of neglect, by the thought that one of the wiles of your satanical foe is to induce you to neglect your grace or your duty. Our Lord teaches this in the parable in which He says that, good seed having been sown in a certain field, an enemy came and over-sowed cockle: this was while the men slept (St. Matt. xiii. 25). Let me adduce for your imitation the example of Nehemias, who was too wary to be led to neglect the great work in which he was

employed. We are told that the enemies of the Jews, seeing Nehemias rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, sought to decoy him from his work. They therefore invited him to the villages at a distance to make a league with them. But Nehemias detected their stratagem, and sent answer: 'I am doing a great work, and I cannot come down, lest it be neglected whilst I come and go down to you' (2 Esd. vi. 3). Four times they sent the same invitation, and four times did Nehemias return the same answer.

Have not you also a great work to do? You must not neglect it. You have a vineyard to keep; you must not have to say: 'My vineyard I have not kept.' Your great work is, as you know, to attend to your own sanctification.

God has lavished upon you countless graces from the time of your baptism until the present hour. Do you keep this unspeakable goodness of God well to the front in your memory? Do you ask yourselves why all this goodness? Do you recognize that it is with design that God has done this? Do you fear lest perhaps you may frustrate God's designs in your regard? There are, no doubt, particular designs in His dealings with every one of you; but there is unmistakably one design common in the case of all of you; and this general design is your sanctification in your own particular calling, with a view to your salvation. 'Now,' says St. Paul, 'being made free from sin, and become servants to God, you have your fruit unto sanctification, and the end life everlasting' (Rom. vi. 22).

Again he says: ' This is the will of God, your sanctification ' (1 Thess. iv. 3).

If these texts are addressed to all Christians, they have their full force and meaning when applied to religious. It is incumbent on you to co-operate with God's designs in the work of your sanctification; but do you? Is there any neglect on your part? Are you afraid to put to yourselves this question: ' Am I doing what is required of me to avail myself of the graces and opportunities that are afforded me by God's goodness for my sanctification? Or am I neglecting my sanctification?' You may be able even now to give some answer to this question in its general bearing upon your manner of life; but as fresh and particular matter will come under your examination during the course of the retreat, you may during it discover where your particular neglect is.

Opposed to neglect is assiduity. The one is detrimental, the other is beneficial; the one is unworthy in religious, the other is commendable and is also expected in them. The graces found in religion are usually richer and more abundant than those which are within the reach of seculars; the graces of the religious state are of a special order; and they should, therefore, if used with assiduity, produce special fruits of sanctification. Witness, the Holy Mass heard every day, the Holy Communion received daily or several times a week, the meditations and prayers, the spiritual reading and other observances, the silence and recollection, and the works to which your holy Institute is devoted.

Who shall say the marvellous results in your sanctification of all these grace-yielding observances and works? You may not feel conscious of their beneficial operation, but take care not to impede it. If you are not conscious of any wilful neglect, you should not be disheartened or discouraged; but yet apply to yourselves the grave exhortation of the Apostle: 'With fear and trembling work out your salvation' (Phil. ii. 12); it is addressed to all. In order to incite yourselves to more earnest and sustained effort, ask yourselves what and where are the fruits of sanctification that you should have gathered.

You are aware, too, that there is a responsibility weighing upon you of yielding fruit according to the grace received; for our Lord said: 'Unto whomsoever much is given, of him much shall be required' (St. Luke xii. 48). Where, then, you may ask yourselves, are the abundant fruits corresponding with the many and special graces bestowed upon you? There is no room for neglect.

Your ideas and principles regarding duty should be based on the solid teaching of our Lord and His Apostles; otherwise the sloth of nature in what concerns spiritual action may lead you to adopt views and practices more conformable with your own unspirituality than with the promptings of grace and the demands of duty. Our Lord, Who said: 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His justice' (St. Luke xii. 31), thereby directing us before all else to labour by dutifulness to please God, has no promise of blessing for the neglectful.

His blessings are for the truly devoted: 'Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice.' St. Peter similarly urges us, saying: 'Labour the more that by good works you may make sure your calling and election' (2 St. Pet. i. 10).

What, then, should you do? You should cultivate your vineyard. You should be earnest and exact in complying with the obligations of your calling. You should attend assiduously to your own spiritual needs, and edify and do good to others. Your Book of Rules delineates the mode of life to be adopted by the members of your Institute. Be faithful in complying with its wise injunctions, and embrace dutifully the holy discipline of religious life.

Thus resolved, you will perform your spiritual exercises, not remissly or with tepidity, but devoutly. Just as you may take your bodily nourishment without its doing you much good, so may you perform these exercises without deriving much profit from them. You should take your food with appetite, and masticate and digest it well; then it will nourish you. You should perform your spiritual exercises willingly, fully, and with religious piety; then will they specially benefit you.

You have, moreover, to protect your vineyard and preserve the vines; that is, you have to guard yourselves against vainglory, conceit, dissipation, sloth, sensuality, worldliness, misunderstandings, uncharitableness, jealousy, envy, and everything that is detrimental to religious virtue. You should look upon these faults and imperfections as insects

that will destroy the vines. You may surmise what evil and what injury will follow, if they are left unchecked and unguarded against.

You have also to keep a watch over your senses, lest they become a stumbling-block to you; lest they admit evil impressions, drawing your soul towards the commission of sin in thought, desire, or act—thus, as it were, letting in the wild beasts to ravage or lay waste the vineyard.

What a lesson you may learn from the assiduous care that some religious bestow upon their bodies! One would almost think that they prize them more than their souls. What attention, sometimes excessive and unseemly, they give to their dress and appearance, to their ease and comfort, to their food and rest! But if the body is sick, how this attention is increased! sometimes, it would almost seem, to the exclusion of all spirituality and even of Christian fortitude. Oh, if all this assiduity could be brought into play in the interests of your soul and of your sanctification!

With other religious, however, the assiduity lies in another direction. They are not open to reproach on the score of excessive attention to their bodily care; their assiduity wears the appearance of zeal; it lies in the direction of labour for others, and of exterior works. Their zeal stops at nothing—that is the fault of it; for zeal should be regulated by the cardinal virtues. The fault is that, while spending themselves for others, or expending all their energy upon exterior works, they neglect themselves. The admonition that St. Gregory addressed to a priest

may also be suitably given to a religious of the class of those whose conduct I am now portraying. The Saint warned the priest to be careful, while rendering help to others, not to leave himself uncared for, and while raising others, not to fall himself.* Solomon says: 'He that neglecteth his own way shall die' (Prov. xix. 16). Let me say, then, that religious who are excessively devoted to exterior works have need to take care lest they weaken and impoverish their souls through neglect of the means that yield the piety, fortitude, and patience that are so necessary to them.

How sad are the consequences when religious neglect their sanctification, no matter from what cause it may arise! In his Lamentations the prophet Jeremias says: 'How is the gold become dim, the finest colour is changed' (iv. 1). When piety is discarded, when prayer is neglected, when Holy Mass is heard only through routine, when Holy Communion is received with very little or no devotion, when religious observance is not valued, and when the Rule is not heeded; ah, may we not fear that religious, as such, will fall away to a shadow from want of spiritual nourishment; that their light will become dim; that their arms will become weak; and that their steps will become feeble? They will not be their former selves; they will be, as it were, in decline. They will lose merit for themselves, and their capability of doing good to others will be lessened. It will be well if what should make them

* 'Ne proximos juvando se deserat, ne alios erigens cadat.'—'De Cura Pastorali.'

truly religious does not finally become extinct in them. Those who knew them in their fervour will meet them now, and be struck with the change; formerly they derived edification from their piety and religiousness, now it will be otherwise. What David said in his affliction may be said by these neglectful religious: 'My heart is withered, because I forgot to eat my bread' (Ps. ci. 5).

It may be thought that perhaps the kind of life led by such religious affords them some satisfaction. It is difficult to conceive how this can be so; for wherever there is neglect, there is a want of security; there must necessarily be a sense of something being wanting, and also a feeling of general unsatisfactoriness. It may be asked, Is anything done really well by negligent religious? They will not be attached to the religious life, as such; sometimes their heart will not be in their work; sometimes they will be brought to their most important duties only by constraint; they will perform others unwillingly. They will not be so devoid of judgment as not to perceive the incongruity of this manner of acting, nor so dull of conscience as not to be sensible of its unworthiness. Yet we see them pursuing the path of neglect of their sanctification with such persistency, that nothing is done perfectly; and it is to be feared that imperfection creeps into their whole conduct, even perhaps into the holiest actions. Such religious cannot feel really satisfied with themselves, and they cannot experience true peace of heart.

Let us ask ourselves, lastly, how they stand with

Almighty God. We have much to learn from the messages sent by our Lord to the Bishops of the seven Churches, and in them there are possibly some passages that might apply to the case of negligent religious. Let me quote a few passages: 'I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first charity. Be mindful therefore from whence thou art fallen, and do penance, and do the first works.' Again: 'Be watchful and strengthen the things that remain, which are ready to die. For I find not thy works full before my God. Observe and do penance.' And again: 'I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot. But because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will begin to vomit thee out of My mouth. Be zealous therefore, and do penance.' The negligent religious have fallen from their first fervour; their works are languishing, and are performed imperfectly: they are lukewarm. To them, therefore, even as in our Lord's name, the message comes: 'Do penance.' Let them arouse themselves to a consciousness of their state, and of its evil consequences; let them respond to the invitation and heed the admonition; let them do penance; and for the love of Jesus Christ Who invites them, let them change their manner of life, so as to make it more pleasing to Him, and more meritorious for themselves. Let them also unite the motive of holy fear to that of love; and let them fear God Who calls them to have a zeal for their sanctification, and Who lavishes such rich and abundant graces upon them. 'How shall we escape,' asks St. Paul, 'if we neglect so great salvation?'

(Heb. ii. 3). 'He that feareth God,' says Solomon, 'neglecteth nothing' (Eccles. vii. 19). Those who neglect grace have reason to fear that God may withdraw His graces from them. The punishment of the negligent servant spoken of by our Lord was that he should lose all. 'Take ye away, therefore, the talent from him, and give it him that hath ten talents. For to every one that hath shall be given, and he shall abound; but from him that hath not, that also which he seemeth to have shall be taken away' (St. Matt. xxv. 28, 29).

Such are the considerations upon the subject of the neglect of the means of your sanctification which deserve your study and examination. So weak and inconstant is fallen nature, that it may be suggested that all of you have need to be upon your guard against falling away from fervour. Possibly there may have actually been some kind of neglect in the important work of zeal for your sanctification? If this has been so, ask yourselves of what kind your neglect is, and what is its extent. It may be neglect of grace, neglect of duty, neglect of the means of sanctification, neglect of necessary precautions, or neglect of many opportunities. If it were not for neglect of one kind or another, what progress you would make, what edification you would give, what good you would accomplish, and what merit you would acquire!

Alas, if when the time of the harvest arrives, you discover, only then, that the wheat has been oversown with cockle and stifled by it! Alas, if when the Lord of the vineyard comes, he shall find it

neglected and laid waste! Alas, if when the cry is heard: 'Behold the Bridegroom cometh, go ye forth to meet Him,' you find yourselves in the company where are also the foolish virgins whose lamps have gone out! Alas, if when the eye is becoming dim, and the death-sweat moistens your brow, the memory of your past lives—instead of consoling you with a picture of assiduity in the service of God, and in the work of your sanctification—shall bring you only misgiving and alarm; because of your neglect of piety and religious observance, and because of the disedification to others which has resulted from it. Alas, if at the last you have to make the avowal: 'My vineyard I have not kept'! Labour now, while there is yet time, to save yourselves from such self-reproach, and from such an undesirable experience. I beg of you not to underrate the evil of persistent neglect and its sad consequences.

The object of your monthly and annual retreats is a renewal of yourselves in the spirit and practices of your holy vocation, and in zeal for your sanctification. It is very important, with a view to this spiritual renewal, that you should endeavour in both those retreats to correct any wilful and persistent neglect that may have crept into your conduct. Conceive, therefore, a sincere desire of amendment; and let it be your endeavour to replace neglect by assiduity. Strive to turn to better account your opportunities of reaping benefit for your own souls, and of doing good to others from the pure motive of God's love. Let it be your desire to yield a more adequate return than in the past for the graces that God has bestowed

upon you so bountifully, so mercifully, and so lovingly, with a view to your sanctification and the accomplishment of your vocation. May God, then, grant you the grace of true conversion from all wilful negligence, so that you may be able to say with holy David: ' Prove me, O God, and know my heart; examine me, and know my paths. And see if there be in me the way of iniquity: and lead me in the eternal way ' (Ps. cxxxviii. 23, 24).

THIRD DAY

VIII.

PURITY OF INTENTION.

'Whether we live, or whether we die, we are the Lord's.' —Rom. xiv. 8.

As religious consecrated to God, and devoted to your holy calling, you are not labouring for any worldly or passing reward. Associated as you are with all who, in one way or another, are ministering to the mission of the Church in the world, it may be said that you are working in the vineyard. With all your fellow-labourers you look forward to the eventide when the Lord of the vineyard will say to His angels: 'Call the labourers and pay them their hire' (St. Matt. xx. 8). You are also associated with the devout religious of every age of the Church, who, under a special call from God, left all things in order to devote themselves more assiduously to labour for their sanctification.

Theoretically all this is so; but that it may be so practically, it behoves you to enter into the spirit of your vocation, to purify your intentions, and to direct your lives and actions to the glory of God, and to the supernatural ends for which you should

labour. So I invite you in this retreat to make the inquiry and examination, to see if your lives and actions are thus directed, and thus rendered meritorious of God's rewards, or if, perhaps, you are somewhat wanting in sincerity of purpose and in purity of intention. If perchance you are at times actuated by selfish, or worldly, or other unworthy motives while, to all appearances, you are acting as devout servants of God, then you should correct this manner of acting.

You know that you set some end before you in everything you do, and that this end gives the character in God's sight to what you do. If the end proposed by you in any action be worthy and meritorious, then the action, if not wrong in itself, will consequently be a worthy and meritorious one. Yet an action, meritorious in itself, may be vitiated by being performed from an unworthy motive. See, then, the importance of being actuated by good motives; and remember, as to this, that it rests with you, grace helping you, to give the good and meritorious motive to your action. God may give the necessary inspiration and assistance, and grace to co-operate, but the decision as to corresponding will rest with you. In this sense you are left your free-will to correspond with grace, and to direct your intention wisely; so that, under these conditions, you may be said ever to hold the key of the situation in your own hands.

With God's help, then, you may direct every action, and the whole course of your religious life, to God; and thus your days will be full of merit. I beg

and exhort you to impress this principle of practical religion thoroughly upon your minds. If happily you do always dedicate your works to God, then are you undeniably His true servants, and you may say with St. Paul: ' Whether we live, or whether we die, we are the Lord's.' Could you desire greater consolation than this ? If unwisely you ever place before yourselves any other aim, can you expect thereby to reap greater gain or satisfaction than this should afford ? How well it would be if you could so far purify your intentions and direct your actions as to be able to say with St. Paul: ' To me to live is Christ, and to die gain ' (Phil. i. 21). By these words he gives expression to the intensity of his zeal for God and his devotedness to his work for our Lord.

When you were novices, you studied the aims which, as members of your holy Institute, you were expected to put before you in your future life in the religious state. You saw how you would be required to practise the virtues of the religious life, to abstain from unnecessary contact with the world and its vanities, and to devote yourselves under obedience to such good works as are undertaken by your Institute.

These are, indeed, holy and worthy ends to place before you in your lives; they give the stamp of holiness to your calling. The more you then studied them, when you were in your fervour, the grander did your calling appear to you; you saw that it was no ordinary secular vocation, but one intended for persons who should renounce the world and their own will, who should be earnest in piety and zealous

only for good. The noble and holy ends proposed to you by the rules and constitutions of your Institute attracted you and attached you to your vocation, and made you desirous of labouring in such a cause.

Are you still fired with zeal to prosecute these holy aims of your Institute? No other ends can appeal so forcibly to your pious devotedness. No other less holy ends could claim the self-sacrificing efforts, the earnestness of soul, the heroism of action and suffering, with which the true and great servants of God have prosecuted these same aims in every age of the Church. Labouring for these holy ends will sanctify your lives and win for you great merit.

But now that you have been a few years in religion, will you degenerate? Will you now, owing to indifference, sloth, self-love, or tepidity, allow your ardour to die out? Will you forget the ends you once put before yourselves with so much ardour? Shall your holy Institute, still young in the Church, begin to fall away from its pristine zeal for the glory of God and for religious virtue and observance? God has blessed its work so far; its first members have left you their footprints of piety, virtue, and edification; and you rightly hold their names in veneration. Does their example cease now to animate you? Is it not incumbent upon you to strive to leave for the religious who shall come after you a similar example of virtue and devotedness? You surely do not deem these days of religious indifference the time to fall away from the fervour of your holy vocation? These are, indeed, the very days in which there is all

the greater need to foster religious instincts, and to maintain religious observance in its full vigour. If laxity and indifference have caused a falling-off from piety among the ordinary faithful, holy Church should be able, at any rate, to point to her religious Institutes as evidence that she is still distinguished by the ineffaceable mark of holiness by which she shall ever be known to be the Spouse of the Lamb. In your Institute, thank God, there is no serious reason for speculating upon any falling away; but you would yet do well to animate yourselves to renewed fervour by calling to mind what the aims and requirements of your Institute are, and by recognizing your obligation to labour with united effort to fulfil them. All other aims are outside the scope of your vocation. It is, therefore, important that you should examine what ends you really have in view, and what is actually the spirit of your service. See if you are servants of God in name only, or in reality; and renew yourselves in the spirit of your minds, that you may not lose any of the precious merits that are to be gained by doing all for God, and in a manner to please Him.

A spirit of faith should pervade your whole conduct. It will remind you of God ever present, and of the fervour and exactitude which you should bring to your service of Him. This spirit of faith will be a safeguard against hypocrisy—a baneful disease that may find its way, in some form or other, and in some degree or other, into the conduct even of religious, to vitiate to some extent much that they do. This spirit of faith will teach you to

purify your intentions, to perform your actions well, to pray with recollectedness, to spend your time profitably, and to recreate yourselves with moderation. It will save you from many faults arising from dissipation of mind and thoughtlessness of conduct. It will remind you of your responsibility to God for all you do—a responsibility from which you are never free.

But does this responsibility really weigh with you? And does it beget in you a sense of duty and carefulness of conduct? Are you always, in a spirit of faith, reckoning with Almighty God? Do you, as indeed you ought, look upon your daily examinations of conscience as times at which to sum up your reckoning? Is it possible that, leaving God out of your thoughts and reckoning, you admit into your manner of life or actions some insincerity, some crookedness, or something that is not straightforward? Can you say that you really act with purity of intention? While making a certain show of religiousness in your conduct, are you perhaps actuated by motives and principles that are not religious? Have you really in view something very different from what appears on the surface? Is there ever in you an intention to mislead your superiors or others in the community? And do you consider such diplomacy honourable in the holy state of life which you have embraced? Would not all good Christians reprobate any such unworthy conduct? Religious certainly cannot deceive themselves into the belief that it can be pleasing to God. It is possible that they may succeed in attaining

their unworthy ends, whatever they may be; but will they really be gainers thereby, if they have not sought the glory of God? St. Paul says: 'Whatsoever you do, do all to the glory of God' (1 Cor. x. 31). What gain, then, was theirs if they had not this, at least virtually, in view? St. Paul asked: 'Do I seek to please men? if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ' (Gal. i. 10). Might not the same be also said when religious seek only to please themselves or the world, or work with unworthy ends in view?

When religious reckon with man and not with God, it is no matter for wonder that many imperfections manifest themselves in their conduct, and that these religious work in only a half-hearted way. May they expect fruit from religious observance, and from the fulfilment of duty assigned to them, if supernatural motives are wanting to instigate and sustain them in meritorious action?

You should be guided by motives and ends worthy of your efforts, otherwise your energy will flag, and your effort will not be sustained. You do not wish to be like those whom St. Paul describes as beating the air and running at an uncertainty; you do not wish to find that you have laboured in vain: you certainly do labour in vain, if you do not work to please God. St. Paul says: 'Be not deceived, God is not mocked: for what things a man shall sow, those also he shall reap' (Gal. vi. 7, 8).

It may be said that there are primary and secondary ends. Undoubtedly this legitimate and necessary distinction must be allowed; but let right

order and place be given to everything. What a waste of time and energy it would be, if, relegating duty to a secondary and subservient place, you were to give your chief thought to your own ease and comfort, to vanity and vainglory, to worldly attachments or dissipation, to love of esteem and honour, or to unworthy ambition! These are some of the causes that may entirely or in part rob your actions of their merit in the sight of God. To place such ends before you is to introduce a blight which will lessen or destroy the fruit of your works, so far as your own merit is concerned. You cannot, then, fail to see that to allow such considerations to detract from the intrinsic value and supernatural merit of your actions, is to act against your own highest interests, and to depart, by so much and so far, from the holy ends that your Institute proposes to you.

It is not too much to expect of you that during this retreat you should resolve, whether as to your general purpose in life, or your particular actions, to purge out of your conduct all unworthy motives and aims.

God, Who is the searcher of reins and hearts, deigns to set great price upon the homage, love, and service of your poor frail human hearts. This homage and service you render chiefly by the motives that regulate your conduct, and by the end you propose to yourselves, and, therefore, by making Him and His good pleasure and glory the object of all you do. In this way He becomes, to use holy David's words, the God of your heart (Ps. lxxii. 26).

It is the heart that gives testimony to your love; for our Lord has said: 'Where thy treasure is, there is thy heart also' (St. Matt. vi. 21). And this saying will lead you to the conclusion that, if those unworthy motives already mentioned exist in your hearts, God does not fully occupy in your affections the place to which He is entitled, and which He demands. It follows, as a necessary consequence, that in this respect your lives are faulty and need reform.

If this reasoning commends itself to you as correct and conclusive, you will not deem this instruction out of place in the retreat. Its object is to make you ask yourselves if you are serving God for God's sake. It is intended to help you to renew your minds in true religiousness, and your lives in fervent and meritorious activity, by the thought of the holy ends for which you are called to work. What energy is displayed in pursuit of pleasure, distinction, or wealth, by secular persons in the world! Be not less earnest in labouring for the glory of God, the good of your neighbour, and your own sanctification. If you seek other ends in your lives and by your labours, then what was said by our Lord of the Pharisees may one day be said of you: 'Amen I say to you, they have received their reward.' Everyone looks to his own master for his reward, and for a reward proportionate to his labour. If you are the servants of God, you will look to God for the recompense of your service; and the day will come when you will hope to receive it. But what if you have unhappily been actuated by motives that have destroyed the

value of your service and made it like that of the Pharisees ?

You remember the history of Cardinal Wolsey, a great Churchman, but a greater statesman, and how his thought and aim were to please his sovereign. What was his reward ? As long as his sovereign could use him for his own ends, he heaped favours upon him; but when Wolsey's conscience forbade him to go the whole length of formally abetting the King's wicked conduct, the favourite fell. How soon then was dissipated the glamour of his earthly greatness ! Who came forward, then, to do him honour ? He died on his way to answer his arraignment, leaving to a reflecting world as a legacy the words: ' If I had only served my God as I have served my King, He would not have abandoned me in my grey hairs.' How different the case would have been if he had placed God before his eyes in all his projects and works !

Do not think little of the practice of purifying your intention, and do not omit to renew your good intentions from time to time, even though the virtual intention, as it is called, may continue; that is, even though the intention by which you have consecrated to the glory of God all you do, not having been arrested or withdrawn, may still virtually exist. This renewal of your intention is a practice that should tend to make you fervent, and instigate you to fidelity, while it will also give supernatural value to your actions. Not only will the exercises that have direct relation to God's service be rendered meritorious by purity of intention, but also your

commonest actions—your coming in and going out, your attention to your bodily needs, your recreations and all you do. What a comfort it will then afford you to remember that your reward is accumulating day by day—a reward that will come to you from God, and be out of all keeping, in its measure and kind, with the little you do to deserve it (St. Luke vi. 38).

You will not be denied this magnificent and everlasting reward if you have really worked for God. How great it will be, and how worthy, therefore, of your present untiring efforts! Yes, day by day you are employed in the service of God, and the recompense that He will bestow will be one worthy of Himself. A picture of it is given by St. John where, speaking of the city of the blessed, he says: 'The throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. And they shall see His face: and His name shall be on their foreheads. And night shall be no more: and they shall not need the light of the lamp, nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God shall enlighten them, and they shall reign for ever and ever' (Apoc. xxii. 3-5). You would do well to keep this picture before your minds.

You are surely resolved now not to lose, or even to lessen, this magnificent recompense by labouring for any unworthy ends, by devoting your energies to what is outside the scope of your vocation, or by failing to direct your lives and actions to God by purity of intention. Religious may contrive to deceive their superiors and others, and even themselves; but they can never deceive their real Master,

to Whom they must look for the reward of their service, God, ' Who will render to every man according to his works ' (Rom. ii. 6).

Put, then, away from yourselves all unworthy self-seeking and everything that might depreciate the value of your good works and the accomplishment of your duty; and let your lives and aims be such that you may with truth be able to say with St. Paul: ' Whether we live, or whether we die, we are the Lord's.'

IX.

HOLY OBEDIENCE.

'Whatsoever our Lord the King shall command, we thy servants will willingly execute.'—2 KINGS xv. 15.

THESE words of David's servants when the King was preparing to escape from the face of Absalom, testify to a true sense of obedience and devotedness. In token of your desire to obey, you as religious should be able to say as much when there is question of complying with the requirements of your rule, and of your superiors: 'Whatsoever shall be commanded, we will willingly execute.' You will obey in a spirit of faith, intending thereby to submit your will to what God requires of you.

You have vowed poverty and chastity, but the consecration of yourselves to God was complete only when you also vowed obedience, thus consecrating to Him your will. To have given Him your wealth and everything else, but to have retained the liberty of doing as you might please, would not have constituted a sacrifice fully satisfactory in His eyes; it would not have made you true religious.

How precious this vow of your will to God is, is seen in the merit with which it clothes all the actions of your religious life; for you live under the vow,

which you are at all times prepared to respect, and under religious obedience.

By the virtue of religious obedience you are dutifully bound to comply with what is required by the constitutions of your Institute and by your superiors. You are seldom, if ever, required to obey by formal command under the vow; and only then would you sin against your vow if you were to refuse obedience. I am dealing now with the virtue of religious obedience, the practice of which is one of the most important duties of your state of life.

The excellence of this virtue proceeds from the consecration to God of your will; but by this consecration you have not injured yourselves, nor has your will been rendered less perfect. Far from it; for you have thereby brought it to a high degree of perfection, seeing that you now unite your will with the Divine Will. By conformity with holy obedience you acknowledge our Lord as your Master, because you obey for His sake: 'One is your Master, Christ' (St. Matt. xxiii. 10). If St. Paul advises servants to obey their masters as though obeying God, how much more earnestly should not religious take his exhortation to themselves. The spirit of your holy rule demands this perfection in your obedience. Your superiors, under ecclesiastical authority, represent in your regard Almighty God. St. Paul's exhortation is: 'Whatsoever you do, do it from the heart, as to the Lord, and not to men' (Col. iii. 23). What consoling fruits of sanctification, and what rich and abundant merits result from true religious obedience! As you seek only to obey the will of God,

your will is thus united to it by a holy conformity, and renders it acceptable and meritorious worship, and therefore by this holy union your will becomes ennobled and sanctified. This happy effect is not of a passing character, but by reason of the permanent character of your obedience it also is permanent; for by your vow you have embraced a state of obedience, and your lives are ever spent in that state. It may be said that your obedience has been sealed and made secure by your vow; even as though in response to the invitation: 'Put me as a seal upon thy heart, as a seal upon thy arm' (Cant. viii. 6). No matter of wonder is it, then, that St. Augustine says of this virtue: 'Obedience is the greatest of the virtues, and I may say the origin and mother of them all' (*Lib. contr. Advers. Legis*).

The excellence of this virtue may also be seen in this, that by obedience you put a control over your own will. You cannot but know what a wayward faculty your will is, and how it causes your falls and your follies. How much you wish that you could place it under a wise subjection! Well, this is done by the practice of religious obedience. 'An obedient man,' says Solomon, 'shall speak of victory' (Prov. xxi. 28). Your first victory, resulting from obedience, is over yourselves. This victory is renewed day by day in good religious, during the whole course of their lives. They are no longer the plaything of their own fickle will, but they do the will of God, Who marks out for them a wise and holy course of conduct.

The excellence of obedience is further seen in its

utility as a means to an end. Every religious Institute proposes to itself some end; this end will not be attained unless the members of the Institute work together for its attainment. It is absolutely necessary that there should be some means of ensuring that the members should do this; the desired means is holy obedience. Obedience binds you to the work, and this is good for you, good for the Institute, and good for the end in view—which end is, according to the designs of God, whatever the Institute has to accomplish. God uses the obedience to which He calls you, and which you promise Him by vow, as the means for the sure attainment of that end. In this, therefore, are seen the wise fitness and utility of obedience in the religious life. And here, in passing, let me call to your mind that the Institute to which you have the happiness to belong is not an imaginary kind of corporation, it is not an abstract body; it is a living body of which you yourselves are the members constituting its being and giving it its vital power; so that it may be said that all the members form its body and soul and fulfil its functions. From this it follows that you are not strangers to the noble works for the glory of God and the benefit of the Church to which your Institute is devoted; but its works must be your works; just as, under the terms of the obedience that you have promised, your Institute claims that your works shall belong to it, and be under its direction and control. As religious, then, you are not now so many separate individuals labouring for independent ends; but you are so many

individuals incorporated into one religious body, labouring for ends common to all. Without obedience this would not be so.

The virtue of obedience has been ennobled by our Divine Lord's practice of it. He is the bright pattern put before you for your imitation. Son of God as He is, by Whom all things were made, to Whom all are subject, and to Whom the Father has given judgment over all (St. John v. 22), He yet took the form of a servant, and became subject to His own creatures: 'He humbled Himself,' St. Paul tells us, 'becoming obedient unto death' (Phil. ii. 8). This was the will of His Heavenly Father: it was enough for Him to know this; for His Father's will was dearer to Him than life. The first Adam brought ruin, dishonour, and death upon our race by his disobedience; but Jesus Christ, the Second Adam, has brought us life and salvation by His obedience. Our Lord's obedience was a lifelong sacrifice of His own will to that of His Heavenly Father made known in the commands of Mary and Joseph and all others to whom, and to whose laws, He submitted Himself. Under this submission He embraced poverty, hardship, exile, toil, persecution, and suffering: 'becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross.' This is the perfect model Whom good religious place before themselves; this is the bright example that encourages them, and leads them even to heroism in their obedience. Christ is the Divine Head of the mystical body (Eph. iv. 15); you, and we all, are the members; He wishes obedience to be perpetuated in the Church, in

His members, and thus to be practised by the whole body.

That our Lord should have become obedient for our sakes is indeed a divine wonder; but that we should become obedient for His sake, is but a small token of the gratitude we owe Him; yet He is pleased to accept this token and to reward it. The obedience of religious is their daily sacrifice; it is especially by the giving up of their own will that they follow our Lord. Our Lord has said to them, as to the Apostles: 'Follow Me'; and they have obeyed. Our Lord has also said to them: 'If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me' (St. Luke ix. 23). Again, religious have obeyed. These words tell you of what kind your obedience should be. You are not to expect everything to be arranged according to your own ideas and wish; but you must expect to have in many ways to give up your own will, and to deny yourselves. There is little value in what costs you little or nothing, but both value and merit where there is sacrifice.

There are to be met with 'easy-going' religious, who are not by any means to be taken as models to be imitated. When they do just as much, or just as little, as they please, as though saying: 'I will break silence, I will not attend this exercise, I will make this visit, I will absent myself from the community,' they thereby manifest a want of religious obedience, and they lose the merit of obedience. When they entered religion they were not accepted upon such terms. If all religious were to act in this manner,

community life would come to an end. Religious should not ask themselves what they would like to do, but what their duty requires of them.

What is the character of the obedience required in your Institute? Should it not be prompt, humble, and willing? Should it not extend to every reasonable command and direction, provided only that, in what you are asked to do, there is nothing sinful or contrary to the rule?

Your obedience will be highly meritorious if it has these qualities. Should it not have them, seeing that, in God's name and for His sake, it is rendered to your superiors in religion, holding God's place in your regard? Your obedience, however, will not be ready, humble, and entire, if it is accompanied by murmurs, and accepted in such a manner as to cause pain to your superiors, or if you meet your superiors' orders with persistent objections; or again, if you manifest such reluctance to comply with what is asked, that they either do it themselves or impose the duty on others. As to certain duties, it happens even that superiors are confronted with some reference to turns—'It is not my turn to do this'; as though, because usually these duties are arranged by an equal distribution, the authority of superiors suffered limitation by such arrangement. This is far from being the case; for the system of turns having only the sanction that the superiors give it, it follows that, when they deem it advisable, they may use in any other way the authority vested in them.

Religious obedience has also to be exercised in

submitting in many ways to the control of your superiors, by going to them for various permissions. These matters are laid down in the rules of your Institute, or in customs that have gained the force of law. Now humility is necessary to all obedience and religious submission; yet religious are to be found who cannot bring themselves to ask their superiors for anything, except when required to do so by the vow of poverty, and perhaps not even then. They are wanting in humility, and in due respect for their superiors and the rule. Such conduct is painful to superiors, not indeed on any personal grounds, but on religious grounds. They see the imperfection of the religious who act in this manner; they know that they do various things for which permission is needed but not asked, so that constituted authority is slighted. When religious object to be under superiors who prudently insist upon dutiful observance of rule, but prefer others who leave them to themselves, it manifests a want of the true spirit of obedience.

Bearing upon a more serious phase of this matter of independent conduct and unwillingness in submission, we find recorded in the Life of Saint Margaret Mary some words of very grave import that it may be well to reflect upon. Our Lord said to His servant: 'Listen well to these words from the lips of Truth. All religious separated and disunited from their superiors ought to regard themselves as vessels of reprobation, in which the best waters turn to corruption, the rays of the sun of grace producing on them the same effect as the natural

sun produces upon muddy waters. These souls are rejected from My Heart. The nearer they endeavour to approach Me by the means of sacraments, prayer, and other exercises, the further I withdraw Myself from them through the horror I feel towards them; they will go from one hell to another. Such disunion has already ruined numbers, and will ruin many more in the end, since every superior holds My place, whether he be good or bad. For this reason, when the inferior thinks only of resisting authority, he is covering himself with so many mortal wounds. It is in vain to knock at the door of My mercy; he will not be listened to, unless I hear the voice of his superior.'

What lax religious object to is the direct exercise of authority over them; yet, in God's kind providence, the exercise of authority is not only a means of their acquiring great merit, but it is also a protection to them against what is faulty in them and unprofitable. For these reasons, then, you cannot fail to see how useful, and what a safeguard and source of comfort, obedience should be to you. You should reflect, also, how, when of yourselves you elect to do anything, not only does the responsibility of the choice rest with you, but also the responsibilities of your action and its consequences. This it is that gives rise to anxiety as to the rectitude, fittingness, and results of what you do. Obedience, on the other hand, casts all this responsibility upon the superior; all that you need to examine before you obey is if what you are asked to do is, according to the constitutions manifestly sinful or not. If

it is not, then you have only to obey; and in every case, whether your action, or the duty imposed upon you, produces the results desired or not, there is always a gain for you: namely, the merit of obedience. What comfort it should afford you to be free from all anxiety, and from all risk, danger, and responsibility, while, at the same time, you merit the reward of the virtuous action on your part!

But note that the amount or degree of your merit in this, as in all other cases, will depend upon the character or quality of your obedience. If it has all the perfection that your holy rule insists upon, the merit will be very great, and your advancement in perfection—albeit that you remain lowly in your own eyes and in the eyes of others—will be proportionately rapid. I ask you also to note that, in order to obtain great merit—provided that you hold yourselves indifferent as to your employment—the duty you perform under obedience need not be one of great importance; for it is rather the spirit of your service than the matter of it that is rewarded.

Do you remember the reproof that Saul received from the prophet Samuel when the people had kept some of the herds and flocks of Amalec, instead of destroying them as commanded by God, and Saul pretended that they had been retained to supply victims for sacrifice? 'Doth the Lord,' said Samuel, 'desire holocausts and victims, and not rather that the voice of the Lord should be obeyed? For obedience is better than sacrifices' (1 Kings xv. 22). It behoves you, in order to render your obedience meritorious, to recognize, in the arrangements of

your superiors and in the requirements of your holy rule, the voice of God. Thus will you secure the highest merit for your actions.

Disobedience in any pronounced form is rare, if not entirely unknown, among you. If, then, you are asked to meditate upon the subject, and to examine yourselves upon it, it is rather with a view to impress you with the conviction of the excellence and utility of obedience, and to invite you to take steps to perfect your practice of this virtue, than to call attention to its absence from amongst you. Direct and grave disobedience would, indeed, be a scandal in any community. Whatever your faults may be, you, at any rate, strive to save your vows from violation and to maintain religious discipline.

But do not misunderstand the gravity of such disobedience. Subjects who refuse to obey their superior, arrogate to themselves the right to command; they, as it were, wrench the reins from out of their superior's hands, and take them up themselves. But by whose authority? All right authority is of God. In this case there is no authority, there is opposition to authority; the action is wrong, and cannot be of God. 'Let every soul,' says St. Paul, 'be subject to higher powers: for there is no power but from God: and those that are, are ordained of God. Therefore, he that resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God. And they that resist, purchase to themselves damnation' (Rom. xiii. 1, 2). Our Lord's words to Saint Margaret Mary, which I just now quoted, must refer to direct, grave, and persistent disobedience,

which classes with disobedience to the ordinance of God.

Disobedience is the great stumbling-block that leads to apostasy. Apostates resist the Church; apostates, too, resist their religious superiors; then comes the fall. How many grave scandals would the Church have been spared, if only religious had loved and practised obedience and dutiful submission! On the plea of wounded innocence, self-respect, superior knowledge, injured rights, or zeal for reform, apostates have rebelled against right authority. I only point out this stumbling-block that you may perceive it, and recognize the danger and evil of it, and therefore carefully avoid it. I am sure that you all are in your hearts persuaded that disobedience never leads to any good, and that religious obedience always tends to your benefit. To this obedience you are happily bound by your profession. You are not released from your obligations even if sometimes superiors do not command or arrange what is wisest and best to be done. It may indeed happen that sometimes superiors make mistakes; but, let me ask, in how many cases is the disobedience of subjects justified?

In view of your obligations, it should ever be your endeavour to obey your superiors readily and fully. Strive to lighten and render pleasant the responsibility cast upon them. 'Obey your prelates,' says St. Paul, ' and be subject to them. For they watch as being to render an account of your souls: that they may do this with joy, and not with grief. For this is not expedient for you ' (Heb. xiii. 17).

To obey as good religious requires great virtue. With the best will in the world, you will yet feel at times great difficulty in obeying. It is especially on such difficult occasions that you will need to call to mind your obligations and the example of our Divine Lord, and to pray for the grace necessary to you. Upon such difficult occasions let me beg of you not to speak without reflection, and not to act without prayer. It is not pretended that obedience will be always easy and natural to you. It is, however, for our Lord's sake that you obey; ask yourselves how you will best please Him. Where you experience the greatest reluctance on the part of nature and self-love, there must grace assert itself, and bring your resisting will under subjection. When the struggle is over, and victory rests with grace, then will God reward you with His consolations.

May your own reflections persuade you to love this exalted virtue of holy obedience, and to set a true value upon it. When you renew your vow to obey, renew also your dutifulness to the claims that religious obedience makes upon your devotedness. Let the renewal be one of the sacrifice of your will to God. By this sacrifice you do not yield to the enemy, but you set him at defiance. You gain command over your own waywardness, which is so often faulty; and you submit yourselves most completely to the most holy, just, and wise will of God. Moreover, you become formidable to your enemy the devil, and victorious over what is ill-regulated in yourselves. How happy will be the fruits of

such a victory in your spiritual advancement and in merit! for now, as St. Paul says, having 'become servants to God, you have your fruit unto sanctification, and the end life everlasting' (Rom. vi. 22).

Pray that grace may enable you to persevere in an edifying spirit of obedience, that the victory over your self-will may be daily. 'To him that shall overcome,' says our blessed Lord, 'I will give to sit with Me in My throne' (Apoc. iii. 21).

God grant that by your religious obedience you may merit this glorious reward!

X.

DEATH.

'Watch ye, therefore, because you know not the day nor the hour.'—St. Matt. xxv. 13.

Concentrate your thoughts this evening upon the serious subject of death—upon your own death. You know how important it is for you to die well; you do not wish for an unprovided end; you would like your house to be well in order when your time comes; what, then, so reasonable as to give the subject your attention during the retreat? Who knows but that, perhaps, in the good providence of God, the graces of this short retreat are to have a very important bearing upon the kind of death you will eventually, sooner or later, die? Perhaps during this retreat you will realize, as you have not done before, that your whole life should be a preparation for death; that the character of your death will be settled by, and correspond with, the character of your life; for the conviction may strike you that the bad religious dies, it is to be feared, a bad death; that the indifferent religious dies an indifferent death; but that the good religious dies a good death; and the saintly religious dies a saintly death. To put this thought in everyday parlance, which is striking, though scarcely respectful to so

grave a subject: just as you travel first, second, or third class by railway according to the carriage that you enter, so—as a rule, and apart from the special dispensations of grace—persons die in the dispositions in which they have served God during life. Would you feel hurt if you were to be asked which of you would wish or be content to die in indifferent dispositions? You would, of course, reject the thought, the bare idea, of any of you dying a bad death—'the death of the wicked is very evil' (Ps. xxxiii. 22), says holy David; and it is quite certain that you would answer emphatically: 'No one would like to die in indifferent dispositions.' You would, one and all, like to make a holy end, and to pass at once into the joys of eternal life. But how can you expect this desired consummation if your lives are not in keeping with it; if, to use railway parlance once more, you are in a different carriage, or running on quite another line?

The thought of death, and what decides its kind or character, and therefore its consequences upon your future destiny, should, if seriously considered, move you to give your lives such a direction as shall, God being willing, secure for you a happy and holy end.

That you have all to die, just as you have yourselves seen others die, needs no proof, but you should yet think of death, persuade yourselves of its certainty, and bear it in mind. 'The end of all things is at hand' (1 St. Pet. iv. 7).

What shall we say of it? Death is the absolute and complete cessation of life in this world; and it

is the only gate by which we can enter into the world to come. It is the separation of soul from body, and the dissolution of our present condition of being, to which condition the union of soul and body is absolutely essential. Death knows no half-measures or compromise; it may be termed 'the great reality.' Life may be prolonged, so that death may be said to have delayed and to be long a-coming—but come it will and must; it cannot turn aside; it will yet claim its victim; it is 'the great inevitable.' It is more than a disease. If you suffer from the most acute and dangerous form of disease, medical science may find a remedy and you may be saved; but when once death has taken place, the doctor arrives and shakes his head, saying: 'Death has taken place; there is nothing to be done.' But just now this man spoke, and saw, and heard, and smiled, and felt, and moved; but now the body is without movement, or pulsation, or sensation: it is but a relic of the dead. A relic? Yes; but an undesirable one. Put it out of sight, bury it deep in the earth; soon it shall be the food of worms and all corruption. This is death.

Do you remember the effect produced upon St. Francis Borgia by the sight of the corpse of the Empress Isabella? So altered was her body a few days after death that St. Francis failed to recognize it as that of his late sovereign. 'What,' he exclaimed, 'has now become those eyes once so sparkling? Where is now the beauty and grace of that countenance which we beheld but such a short time ago? Are you her sacred Majesty the

Donna Isabella?' Leaving the spectacle, he retired to his apartments to reflect in silence and tears upon what he had seen. 'What is it, my soul,' he said, 'that I seek in the world? How long shall I pursue and grasp at shadows? What has she already become who was but now so beautiful, so great, so much revered? This death which has thus treated the imperial diadem has already levelled its blow to strike me. Would it not be prudent to prevent its stroke, by dying now to the world, that at my death I may live to God?' He wisely carried out his resolution by entering the religious state as soon as circumstances permitted it.

Another thought is this: death will close your relations with everything in the world—if we except only that 'uncertain quantity,' the charity that may be displayed towards you by the prayers and suffrages of the few who will remember you. This snapping of the bonds adds to the anguish of death in the case of the avaricious. 'O death,' we read in the Book of Ecclesiasticus, 'how bitter is the remembrance of thee to a man that hath peace in his possessions' (xli. 1). At death you will part from the house you lived in, the chapel you prayed in, the scenes that surrounded you, the religious who laboured with you, the friends who esteemed you, the crowds you passed through, the room you occupied, the books you used, the faces you saw, the voices you heard. To you they will be no more, and you will be no more to them. Death will remove you absolutely from all these: it is the 'great parting,' the departure that shall not be

succeeded by a return, for you will go, never to come back (Ecclus. xxxviii. 22). 'So man,' said Job, 'when he is fallen asleep, shall not rise again till the heavens be broken: he shall not awake, nor rise up out of his sleep' (xiv. 12). Call to mind, besides these words, what David said when his child had died: 'Shall I be able to bring him back any more? I shall go to him rather; but he shall not return to me' (2 Kings xii. 23).

Take as a final thought this: death is universal. Not to speak of the first inhabitants of the globe, or those who first peopled your own country—where, I ask, are the men and women, the kings and queens, the distinguished statesmen, generals and scholars, the devout priests and nuns, who flourished in the very last century? Where the pious religious who first flourished in your holy Institute? Where many of those whom you yourselves have known, and perhaps some who dwelt in the very house that you now occupy? Where many of the friends of your childhood, where dear relatives whose place is now found no more? Gone—dead. All past generations have paid this penalty of sin. Even Enoch and Elias, who have been reserved by God for a special mission, have escaped the universal law only for the period divinely appointed. You may say: Yet the world is still alive with men. Yes; but those who live to-day shall, before another century has passed, be as dead as their forefathers, and we all with them. 'It is appointed unto men once to die' (Heb. ix. 27): the law is universal.

We all will one day have to face the ordeal. The

time will come, sooner or later, when it will be told you that your sickness is very serious. Happy you, if you are fervent and well-prepared when these tidings are conveyed to you! You may receive them at a time when you have many plans for work before you, and little dream that the end is near; and when you perhaps fancy that you will be quite well again in a few days' time. You may receive these tidings when you are living in a careless manner; when your minds are in a state of chronic dissipation, or, even worse, when you have unhappily fallen into a condition of tepidity bordering on mortal sin. Again, this alarming information may be sprung upon you when your time has long been engrossed with engagements and pursuits quite outside the duties of your religious calling; or when you are perhaps secretly intriguing to bring about some change that you desire, or to attain some position which it would have been better that you had not even thought of; or, again, when you have been overcome by some predominant failing. Finally, this warning of your danger may be given you when you are promising yourselves yet many years more to live. 'Be you then also ready: for at what hour you think not, the Son of Man will come' (St. Luke xii. 40). 'Watch ye, therefore, because you know not the day nor the hour' (St. Matt. xxv. 13).

It is to be hoped that, through timidity or false charity, your attendants may not deceive you as the prophet Eliseus deceived Benadad, the King of Syria. When the messenger came to the prophet

to ask if the king would recover from his sickness, Eliseus replied: 'Go tell him, Thou shalt recover: but the Lord hath shown me that he shall surely die' (4 Kings viii. 10).

Between the receiving of the warning and the end, how little time will intervene! Sometimes it is a matter of only a few days, often of only a few hours—all too short for the work of vital importance to eternity that has to be done in those quickly passing moments. 'Blessed,' said our Lord, 'are those servants whom the Lord when He cometh shall find watching' (St. Luke xii. 37).

Death is the gate by which you will have to enter into the world to come. 'But man,' said Job, 'when he shall be dead and stripped, and consumed, I pray you where is he?' (xiv. 10). Nowhere, as far as this world is concerned; but his soul has been launched into eternity. 'Man,' says Solomon, 'shall go into the house of his eternity' (Eccles. xii. 5). His soul, once it has been released from the trammels of the body, stands before God, arraigned before His dread tribunal. The veil has been lifted. While in this world, his soul lay hidden under the cover of the body; the cover has now been cast aside and the soul stands unveiled in its beauty or in its deformity. It has lost nothing of its life, nor is it deprived of its intellectual faculties; but it has passed from the period of trial, of meritorious work and fruitful repentance. In this sense, therefore, will death be to you the gate to the life to come.

If now you ask yourselves when you will die, you propose a question to which a definite answer cannot

be found, other than the certainty of the uncertainty of the time of your death. This is why you are told to be ever prepared, ever on the watch; and nothing could be so unwise—perhaps so fatal—as to neglect this salutary warning. Have you never hinted the warning to others? Perhaps you need it most yourselves. 'Watch ye therefore,' our Lord says to you, 'because you know not the day nor the hour.'

We read how Samuel, thirty-eight years before his death, made his reckoning with Israel, addressing the people in these words: 'I am old and grey-headed, having conversed with you from my youth unto this day; behold, here I am. Speak of me before the Lord, and before His anointed, whether I have taken any man's ox or ass: if I have oppressed any man. . . . They said: Thou hast not wronged us or oppressed us.' Samuel asked their testimony as to his life, as though he would then set his house in order. You have to reckon not with man, but with God. It is not too soon to prepare yourselves to do it. Do not delay putting your house in order; and if you may not ask for testimony from without, you may always seek the witness of your conscience within. Have you wronged God, or man, or your own souls? Have you fulfilled your duties as faithfully as Samuel fulfilled his; so that your superiors and your community, or those under your charge, could not, if asked, upbraid you with disedification, neglect, or omission? 'Thou hast not wronged us, or oppressed us.'

Now indeed is the time, and not when you will be laid prostrate by your last sickness—now is the

time when you should prepare for death. You would wish then your preparation to be good, to be the best possible. But then your mind, if you possess your faculties at all, will most probably be engrossed with your ailments and bodily needs. Then, if you be conscious, you will be incapable of doing more than to utter an ejaculatory prayer and an act of resignation. Then your time will be short, and the moments in which you will be able to pray may be few. Then, if your sickness has come suddenly upon you, you will have but little, if any, opportunity of giving edification or of repairing scandal. Then you may be so alarmed at your condition that all devotion will fly from you; and a sad uneasiness may stamp itself upon your countenance, and manifest itself in your words. Then, although you may need much encouragement and help, the serious nature of your sickness may necessitate the precaution of your being kept absolutely quiet, and but few words may be spoken to you. Ah, it will not do to depend, for your preparation for death and eternity, upon those few uncertain moments of final consciousness, during which it is quite possible that pain and weakness may render you unfit for any effort. This was never intended. The best possible preparation for death is a good life; and for religious, a good religious life—that is, a life in which you persevere in exemplary conduct, in the faithful fulfilment of the duties of your state, in piety, and in the practice of the religious virtues.

Do you doubt this? Do you believe it? If happily such is your life, then, whether death comes

early or late, you will be ready. You remember how, of the ten virgins of the parable, only five were wise; and these, when the Bridegroom came, had their lamps ready, and they 'went in with Him to the marriage' (St. Matt. xxv. 10). The parable teaches you to be ever ready, for you have to count upon death overtaking you when you least expect it. Even so, if you are devout religious, it will not find you unprepared. Our Lord said: 'Let your loins be girt, and lamps burning in your hands. And you yourselves like to men who wait for their lord' (St. Luke xii. 35, 36).

Has it never happened, after the death of some religious, that the members of the community have ventured to regret particular faults or ways? While admitting that the deceased had certain good points, have they yet seen reason to say that they had others that were unsatisfactory? Did they, perhaps, say that the deceased might have been more regular, that they had certain weaknesses, that unhappily they had caused misunderstandings or intrigued for their own ends, that they had been hard to live with, or that their temper and want of consideration for others had been very trying? What would such reckonings-up signify? They would show that, perhaps for years, there had been faultiness and disedification, although such faultiness might not have given rise to any serious misgiving. You would not like to give occasion for similar remarks about yourselves. Your steps along the path of life leave footprints that others may see. So walk as not to give rise to misgiving in yourselves or others.

We will now turn to consider another picture. How different are the feelings, and how consoling the appreciations in the case of devout and observant religious when awaiting their summons to another world! You regard them as faithful servants of their Lord, who have done their work, who are found watching, and who are going to their reward. You call to mind the hope-inspiring words of the psalmist: 'Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His Saints' (Ps. cxv. 15). Precious before God is the death—not of those who have given way to evil inclinations, who have loved the world, or who have followed foolishness—no; but the death of His Saints, of those who have 'loved justice and hated iniquity' (Ps. xliv. 8). You feel that what was said by the mother of St. Symphorian to her son when on his way to a glorious martyrdom is to be realized also in the case of these edifying religious: 'Life is not taken away from thee, but changed to one that is better.' O happy change! it shall be the exchange of grace for glory; their charity shall blossom into eternal life. The happy moment of their triumph is drawing near. They have been humble, they shall be exalted; they have tasted sorrow, it shall be changed into joy. Jesus Christ, Who has won the victory in His own person, must triumph also in every one of His elect. 'Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?' (1 Cor. xv. 54). Depart, O servants of God, in peace.

Such is the death which you desire for yourselves; the preparation, then, must be in accordance with

it. Must that be said of you who are consecrated to God, which was said by Moses of the fickle Israelites—'They are a nation without counsel and without wisdom. O that they would be wise and would understand, and would provide for their last end'? (Deut. xxxii. 29). Will you neglect your work of preparation in the midday of life, and then at its close be filled with alarm, exclaiming: 'Woe unto us, for the day is declined, for the shadows of the evening are grown longer' (Jer. vi. 4)? No, you have thought of death; your whole life in religion is a preparation for it. But in the light of the considerations put before you in this conference, and with the conviction now weighing upon you that the character of your death is likely to be in keeping with the character of your life, now is the time to ask yourselves if you are satisfied with your past and present preparation. This is the question that you should put to yourselves during your meditation to-morrow morning, and your reflections should determine you not to neglect or to put off your remote (as it is called) preparation for a happy death. You have it in your power to save yourselves from many regrets at the solemn moment of death. Your action determined upon now may prove the source of sweet consolation then, when you will cast about for anything and everything likely to comfort you, and to strengthen your hope of a favourable judgment. As death will gain rapidly upon you in your last sickness, how sincerely will you deplore your sins, your remissness, and your want of fervour, fidelity, and zeal! How much you will wish that you could live

your lives over again! What a true view you will then take of the blessings offered you in the religious life! What keen regret you will then feel that you have not done and suffered more for God! Then, indeed, shall sin impress you with a truer sense of its deformity, and of its evil consequences; while you will realize the truth of the words of Solomon (Eccles. xii. 13), that to fear God and keep His commandments is all man—that is, all man need be anxious about. Then, too, will you be fully convinced that you should not have lived to live, but have lived to die; that life was only leading up to death, the great goal of existence. Please God, there shall be no false step, and no delusion or pretence about your preparation.

And now, in drawing our considerations to a conclusion, you might be addressed in the words of the prophet Jeremias: 'Give ye glory to the Lord your God before it be dark, and before your feet stumble upon the dark mountains' (xiii. 16). Perhaps, for some among you, the sombre mountains are already casting longer shadows, and the night is nearer than you think.

Thank God, you are religious not unmindful of your duties; you are imbued with the spirit of your Institute, and your lives are spent in useful and holy work. Well, the bright haven of peace lies before you: set your sails for it, and keep it in view. The sails are holy desires and firm resolutions to do good. The chart you must sail by is the way, not only of God's commandments, but also the way of the holy counsels and of a devout religious life. The compass

is an enlightened conscience. With due attention to the sails, the chart, and the compass, you will sail safely on and reach the port. A happy death will be to you the holy haven of everlasting peace. There you will land upon the eternal shore, and enter into your Heavenly Father's house. O sweet and consoling hope! Be faithful, then, and persevere; and be filled with the sentiments of holy David, when he sang: 'I rejoiced at the things that were said to me: We shall go into the house of the Lord' (Ps. cxxi. 1).

FOURTH DAY.

XI.

OBSERVANCE OF RULE.

'Keep the law and the counsel: and there shall be life to thy soul.'—PROV. iii. 21, 22.

THE observance of rule is so far bound up with religious perfection that it may safely be asserted that, if you disregard your rules, you disregard your religious perfection; for your obligation to tend to perfection comprises not only the keeping of your vows, but also the observance of your rules. Although the rules, every one, do not bind you to observance under pain of sin, you should yet try to comply with them faithfully; and especially should you guard yourselves against anything like systematic neglect of them, as this would give scandal, and might be injurious to religious discipline. Were such a result to follow there would be sin. Theologians teach that frequent and notable transgression of the rules, even of such as are not of themselves binding under sin, may become sinful, and even grievously sinful, by reason of scandal, or of the relaxing of religious discipline.*

* See Lehmkuhl, Ed. xi., vol. i., No. 671. The following passages occur in Suarez ('De Oblig. Relig.'): 'Si quis sciens

When you consider how much the observance of your rules protects and assists you in your spiritual life, it is hard to reconcile systematic neglect of rule with the tending to perfection that is a strict obligation of your state. At any rate, you must admit that the truly devout are known always to be lovers and observers of rule; you must also acknowledge that religious who keep their rule are edifying religious; and you rightly believe that they will receive the reward both of their observance, and of the edification resulting from it.

You should not lose sight of the duty of giving edification. On the one hand, you are obliged to acknowledge that neglect of rule may become sinful because of the scandal given by it. On the other hand, you have the consolation of knowing that your observance of rule will be very meritorious because of the edification that it will give. Spiritual life in yourselves and in others is ever under the influence of external agencies; scandal is detrimental to it, edification is beneficial to it. You are ever making some impression on those who are round about you; this impression is good or bad, and you will be held accountable for it. You know that the impression made by religious who disregard the obligations of their rule is a bad one. If the

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et videns, longo tempore deficit ab observatione totius regulæ, habet plus quam virtualem consensum non proficiendi in perfectione secundum suam regulam; ergo si formalis est peccatum mortale, etiam et virtualis. Si quis intendat non esse sollicitus in observatione regulæ, dispositio hæc est peccatum mortale.'

religious are superiors, who both neglect these obligations themselves and suffer their neglect in others, the matter becomes even more reprehensible.

Let me remark that I do not wish, in this conference, to stretch the culpability of breach of rule beyond what is strictly laid down in moral theology; but you have always to consider also the bearing of your neglect upon your spiritual life.

Now this time of your retreat is one in which to study your duty with regard to your holy rules and religious observances, and to apply a remedy to any neglect or shortcomings that you may discover in your conduct. Be resolved, at least, to have a good-will to do what you can to keep your rules, which should not on any account be regarded as a 'negligible quantity.' As a preliminary to inspiring earnestness in forming this resolution, you should be impressed with a proper appreciation of the rules and observances of your holy Institute.

It need not be said that, in the main, it is the vows of religion which constitute the difference between secular persons and persons consecrated to God in religion; but, as far as public opinion goes, religious are distinguished from seculars by their rule of life. In religious orders of men, the members are called regulars because they follow a rule. So you have to acknowledge the important bearing that your holy rules have upon the essential obligations of the religious life; they are, indeed, to be looked upon as an outer bulwark to protect your vows, and as a means to help you to fulfil your obligation of tending to perfection.

Your holy rules are a protection to your vows, especially because of their disciplinary effect.

To observe your vows, you have necessarily to practise self-restraint and self-sacrifice. Undisciplined religious, following their own whims and become a law to themselves, will not always be prepared for the restraint, and the giving up of self-will, demanded by the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, for they do not make the proper preparation for all that these vows demand of them. If they rise in the morning according only to their own convenience; if they take unnecessary repose either by night or day; if they neglect meditation and other religious observances required by the rule; if they show but little respect to superiors, and but scant courtesy to certain members of the community, while perhaps they are very friendly with many secular persons; if they have no relish for the duties assigned to them; if they, however, take great pleasure in frequent gossiping and in seeing persons in the parlour; if they resent every attempt to correct their conduct; if they conceal various projects and doings from the superiors; if they try to create dissension in the community, or to form parties in it; if they habitually break silence and cause others to do the same; if they are immortified, and difficult to please as to diet; and, finally, if they have a habit of grumbling and of breeding discontent; how are such religious prepared to observe all that their holy obligations of a strict poverty, a perfect chastity, and an entire obedience demand ?

Will they obtain the required permissions for spending, borrowing, lending, receiving, giving, keeping, and using necessary in the observance of the vow of poverty? Even when the superior is at hand, and perhaps in cases when no permission could reasonably be granted, will they not presume permissions? In various matters as to poverty, even when their action is inexcusable, will they not pretend that their conscience sanctions their doings?

Such lax religious are liable to fail to some extent even as regards holy chastity. Owing to immortification and want of a wise control, if not also to unguardedness and absence of a fervent piety, it is possible that the delicate flower of a perfect chastity may be affected by a wayward imagination or a too sensitive affection, or in other ways.

Lastly, how can it be said that religious who are so independent of control understand fully the obligations of religious obedience? May they not prove to be a constant thorn in the side of their superiors? Will they not frequently strive to bring the superiors to require them to do just what they themselves have made up their mind to do? Then will there not be also shirking of duty, murmuring, and other faults against the virtue of religious obedience?

We are therefore led to believe that, through laxity in conduct and the want of the spirit of religious observance, these undisciplined religious expose themselves to some failure even in the keeping of their vows. Would it surprise us if eventually they were to be guilty of some serious breach of their

religious obligations? Unhappily there have been religious who began by disregarding the wise and salutary prescriptions of their rule, and who ended by seeking a dispensation from their vows. This bears out what we read in the Book of Wisdom: 'Undisciplined souls have erred' (xvii. 1).

Turn now from this picture to see, on the other hand, how beneficial is the result of observance of rule. To good religious the discipline of exact observance is not a burden, but a sweet yoke. By it they are schooled to that piety, that guardedness, that conscientiousness, that firmness of principle, that honesty of purpose, that self-sacrifice, and that devotedness to the religious life which practically ensure their faithful observance of the vows. They may feel confident that, when there is question of keeping their vows, God, Who will reward their spirit of observance, and Who will bestow innumerable graces upon them, will then support, inspire, and guide them. While the outer bulwarks are well guarded, the citadel will be safe.

I have said that fidelity to rule is, first, a protection to your vows, and, secondly, a means to help you to fulfil your obligation of tending to perfection. It remains for me to consider this second view of the importance of the rules.

There is an undoubted obligation upon religious to tend to perfection by the observance of their vows and of the rules of their Institute. We need not dwell here upon what precise amount of neglect of rule would show that religious had ceased to tend to perfection; the point to be considered is this,

that the observance of your rules manifests that you are fulfilling this essential obligation; while, on the other hand, your disregard of them would show that you are not very much in earnest about your perfection.*

Theologians lay down that religious are bound to tend to perfection by the observance of the vows and constitutions of their Institute; therefore there is, according to them, an obligation of obedience to the rules, as far as this tending to perfection demands it. Good religious wish to please God, and to sanctify their soul by a full and faithful compliance with all the obligations of their state; and they recognize that these obligations extend not only to keeping their vows, but also to observing their rules. They see that the prescriptions of the rule provide for hearing Mass every day, for the frequent reception of the holy sacraments, for meditation and prayer, for various devout practices, for community life, and for an exterior deportment in keeping with their vocation. They recognize the wisdom of all these prescriptions, and how, if only they fulfil them faithfully, they cannot but advance in perfection. They see that they are suitable to the life and vocation to which they have been called; and that the observance of them will form them for their vocation, sustain them in it, and aid their perseverance. Convinced of all this, they will appreciate and love their rules, and observe them. They are not religious who ask how far they may disregard them without sin. As a consoling result of observance of

* As to this duty see 'Short Readings for Religious,' 13.

rule, they will continue to be devout religious, happy in their vocation, and they will advance steadily in the path of perfection.

But where, we may ask, is zeal for religious perfection in undisciplined religious whose conduct I but now attempted to depict—in religious who absent themselves from meditation and other spiritual exercises, who do not observe the horarium of the community, who make their spiritual reading without interest or profit, and who disregard other wise prescriptions of the rule regulating their conduct inside and outside of their religious house? Such religious find time for receiving useless visits, for unprofitable reading, for extended relaxation, for gossip, and for sleep; but where are devotedness to duty, religious mortification, self-restraint, and piety? These are the things that matter; these are the things that count in the pursuit of religious perfection. In what way do these religious give edification in their community? It may be asked if they are not going backward rather than forward, and if many venial sins are not committed in such a manner of life; and, finally, if such religious have not reason to be dissatisfied with the kind of life they are leading. What should be thought of a soldier who wore indeed a military uniform, but who did not attend the drill or other military exercises? He could not be looked upon as a good soldier. And what shall we think of undisciplined religious? No matter what may be their amiability of character, or their talents or accomplishments, or the number and attachment of their friends, we

should yet say that they are not good religious since they fail in observance, and neglect striving to attain the perfection of their state (Can. 593).

Come now to make an examination as to the observance of some of the wise requirements of your rule; you can complete it yourselves.

We have considered in another instruction the important duty of meditation. How do you fulfil this duty? Do you absent yourselves without sufficient reason? Do you spend the time of meditation in performing other devotions, or in making your plans for the day?

Are you careful to make your spiritual reading? Do you devote to this exercise the full time prescribed? This useful study supplies you with a fund of useful instruction, and contributes to your religious formation. It, moreover, furnishes valuable lessons and examples, and helps to feed piety; and, finally, it prepares you by profitable counsels for the difficulties and temptations that beset your path in life. Spiritual reading should, therefore, be made with attention and reflection, so that you may derive the intended profit from it.

The present Canon Law (Can. 592, 593) requires that religious, both interiorly and exteriorly, and in the practice of virtue, should excel ordinary lay persons (Can. 124). It prescribes for all religious, besides weekly confession, and frequent, even daily, Holy Communion (Can. 595), also for every day mental prayer, a visit to the Blessed Sacrament, the recitation of the Rosary, and examination of conscience (Can. 125).

Do you visit the Blessed Sacrament every day? Do you realize what this means, and strive to make the visit with a lively faith and an earnest affection of piety? What a precious treasure the Blessed Sacrament is to all the children of holy Church, but especially to religious! When at Holy Mass, do you recognize that it is a Divine Sacrifice that is offered, and one therefore in itself of infinite value? Be on your guard against assisting at it with routinal familiarity. As to confession and Holy Communion, they will be considered in separate conferences.

Do you try to draw profit from the recitation of the Rosary? This devotion may be described as a treasury of spiritual goods, an album of devout and instructive pictures, a garden of fragrant blossoms. It brings Jesus and Mary, and sometimes St. Joseph, before you in scenes you should never tire of contemplating. You have them under your gaze, you listen to their words, you study their conduct, you admire their virtues, you see what has been done for your sanctification and salvation, and you feel your heart moved to worship, to give praise, and to love.

Are you faithful in acquainting your superiors with your occupations and in seeking their sanction for your undertakings? Are you careful to go to them in all the circumstances that your rule lays down? Do you recognize their authority over you in everything, except in matters of ecclesiastical jurisdiction?

Examine yourselves upon the subject of self-

restraint in speaking and criticizing; also, as to mortification, as to your meals; and lastly, as to spending your time profitably. Complete the examination with your rule-book before you. This book should be your rule of life, as it manifests what God requires you to do in order to please Him, and to acquire the perfection of your state. Do not follow those who say that the smaller points of the rule are matters of no account; for there is question of your devotedness to duty, and of pleasing God in all you do. The smaller points, as well as greater ones, are matter of duty. By observing them in a spirit of devotedness, you offer pleasing service to God. Moreover, there may result from persistent non-observance in smaller points unfaithfulness in what are of greater importance; for our Lord said: 'He that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in that which is greater, and he that is unjust in that which is little, is unjust also in that which is greater' (St. Luke xvi. 10).

Put before yourselves the edifying example of members of your Institute who won respect by their observance of rule. It was fruitful in their own personal sanctification; it diffused around the good odour of religious virtue, it brought a blessing on their works, and it gained for themselves untold merit. Beware of sloth, secular claims, self-indulgence, want of generosity, and bad example, which may lead you from regular observance. Offer your devotedness to rule to our Lord as a token of your love, and to your Institute as a proof of your loyalty. Take pleasure in doing your duty. Then

will you experience that the yoke is sweet, and the burden light. 'Let not these things depart from thy eyes: keep the law and the counsel: and there shall be life to thy soul.'

And now, in conclusion, reflect that the maintenance of religious discipline—which is inseparable from the religious life—depends upon the compliance of all; and therefore individual members fall under the obligation of this compliance. If every individual religious were free to do as he or she pleased, there would be no discipline.

This is the age of trade unions, and of combinations for mutual protection. Let me urge upon you also to club together for the protection of your Institute and of one another: your holy rules demand common action. Your compliance with them ought to correspond with your respect for, and attachment to, the religious life, to which life you acknowledge with thankfulness you have been called by God's special goodness and mercy. Let all, then, in God's name, love and respect the wise discipline of religion and the rules which maintain it. How much depends upon your united compliance! You can, if you so wish, make your abode a house of good religious; but, alas! if you neglect your rule, you may make it a house of dissipation and disorder.

For the honour of religion generally and of your holy Institute, and for the sake of your own merit and sanctification, strive ever to maintain the spirit of observance among you, and to show yourselves to be fervent religious by dutiful fidelity to your holy rules. This fidelity will be a practical proof of your

love of God and of your calling; it will save you from many faults and dangers; and it will bring many blessings upon your present life, and smoothen your path to the heavenly reward. 'Keep the law and the counsel, and there shall be life to thy soul and grace to thy mouth. Then shalt thou walk confidently in thy way: and thy foot shall not stumble.'

NOTE.—Canon 605: 'All who have the custody of the enclosure shall carefully see lest, from intercourse with outsiders, the discipline be relaxed and the religious spirit weakened by useless conversation.' Evidently canon law would insist upon religious discipline.

XII.

CONFESSION.

'If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves.'—1 St. John i. 8.

An important duty of every week is your confession. Fidelity to it is desirable on account of your frailty and your dependence upon grace, and on account of the purity of conscience demanded by your daily assistance at Holy Mass, your frequent or perhaps even daily reception of Holy Communion, and your religious consecration to God. Great Saints have sought sacramental absolution every day. The least you can do is to approach the holy sacrament of Penance once a week. This is the custom in religious Institutes, and is laid down by Canon Law (Can. 595).

This sacrament is a most efficacious remedy against sin, and a great help to purity of soul. Therefore should you value it, and avail yourselves willingly and dutifully of so inestimable a benefit. What convincing evidence this sacrament of reconciliation (2 Cor. v. 18) affords you of God's unfathomable mercy, and of His tender and paternal love and compassion! The arms of His mercy are open to you, not once only, but as often as, touched with true sorrow for sin, you fly to them; and so

often, as though in the saving bath of the Precious Blood, does He wash out your sins, removing the guilt from your stained souls. Because the remedy is thus ever at hand, you must not think less of the guilt of sin, though it be only venial, nor of your absolute need of pardon. You depend for pardon, not upon any merit of yours, but upon the mercy of God, and upon the application to your souls of the saving merits of our Lord's Passion and Death.

If you examine the steps that you have to take to secure so desirable and necessary a boon as the forgiveness of your offences against God, what do you find? You might, indeed, inquire: Where shall you seek the tribunal? Who is its minister? What lengthy process has to be employed? What heavy charges have to be incurred? How long shall you have to wait before the sentence is pronounced? What difficulties stand in the way? How many persons will hear your accusation? Will your faults be registered, and to whom will the register be open for inspection? By what heavy penalty will you be required to expiate your offences? There is nothing of all this.

You perceive the excess of our Lord's goodness in the facility with which your pardon may be obtained. Any priest having jurisdiction, and approved as your confessor, can absolve you. You kneel in the confessional without being observed; you confess your sins with the requisite dispositions in secret, and the confessor is bound by the strictest obligation to respect your secret; he imposes a light penance, and finally pronounces the words of absolution.

Because the forgiveness of your sins may be obtained with such little trouble, and upon such easy terms, is this to be regarded as a reason why you should fail to seek it? Would you be more eager for it if it would cost you more to obtain it? Ah, no. Be sensible, then, of our Lord's consideration for you in all that concerns the pardon of your sins. See and remark how the case stands. Through frailty you sin; and even though your sin be only venial, it yet has its malice and its consequences. Thereby you incur guilt and just punishment. Do you not wish to be relieved from this spiritual evil—from your sin and its consequences? Unless you repent of your sin and receive pardon, the evil will remain.

By way of warning, while at the same time offering further reflections upon this subject, we will now examine a case that happily is seldom met with. It is that of religious who do not appreciate weekly confession. Let us suppose that these religious say to themselves: 'The fact is, I do not see why I should go to Confession once a week, for I have nothing to confess.' At first sight this reasoning may seem plausible; but when it is examined, even if it have solid grounds, which may be doubtful, it will be found scarcely to merit our respect. Why? Because the holy sacrament of Penance imparts special graces, besides the increase of sanctifying or habitual grace, if it be approached with proper dispositions, even by those who are not conscious of any deliberate venial sin, provided that the requirements of the sacrament be met by the confession of

some sufficient matter—namely, some deliberate sin or kind of sin, whether mortal or venial, of one's past life—with a renewal of sorrow for it, and purpose to avoid sin in the future. This, as you know, is what theologians teach. You cannot, therefore, fail to recognize how wisely it is required of you to avail yourselves of the graces of the sacrament of Penance once a week, even though you may not be conscious of having committed any deliberate sin. Then again, your going to Confession under these circumstances once a week, with repentance and sorrow so often renewed, will be to you a great help and safeguard against sin; whereas, if you were to keep away from this sacrament for any length of time, your sense of sorrow and compunction might become less keen, your self-examination less exact, and your watchfulness over your conduct less earnest; with the sad consequence that you would come to fall more readily into neglect of duty and into deliberate sin. Besides these reasons in favour of weekly Confession when we have not fallen into fresh deliberate sin, another reason is founded upon the habit of holy persons. Other religious of your own and of every religious Institute, and many Saints and devout persons, have practised weekly Confession; their example invites you to do the same.

Please note that in adducing these arguments we are supposing that the reason which these religious have alleged for not going every week to Confession is quite true: 'I have nothing to confess.' But possibly there is some inaccuracy, or some mistake in this statement. Let me ask: Who are they that

make it? Are they religious who are remarkable for exact observance? or who bear the repute of great piety? or who are religious of irreproachable conduct? Very likely not; for all such religious are truly humble: they entertain a lowly opinion of themselves; they detect failings in themselves which others do not observe; and they respect the observances of the religious life, and gladly avail themselves of weekly Confession as a valuable means of procuring purity of soul. May we not, then, conclude that it would be rather surprising if any such devout religious were to say: 'I do not see why I should go to Confession once a week, for I have nothing to confess'? We are, therefore, left to infer that such a remark as this is made by religious of a somewhat different stamp—indeed, by religious who, if they only made an earnest and proper preparation, might derive special benefit from weekly Confession. Let us hope that such a view of the case may strike them, and that, in order to secure the special benefit, they may come to adopt the wise course followed by so many not-less-good religious, and go to Confession once a week.

Before dismissing this case, let us surmise that if these religious were to meditate upon the words of St. John, 'If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves,' they might find that they have some slight application to their case. They may not be aware of how far their views differ from those of the Fathers of the Church. St. Gregory the Great, speaking of men of virtue, chosen souls, recommends even daily confession to them; for, he asserts, they

must have faults to confess (*in* 1 Reg., lib. 2, cap. 1, vers. 5). He proceeds to invite all who approach Holy Communion daily to prove themselves by daily Confession, because, he says, we offend daily. St. Augustine (*sup.* Ps. xcix.) urges us to frequent Confession. His words are that we should confess always, because we always have matter for Confession. 'It is difficult,' he says, 'in this life for a man to be so far purified as not to find in himself anything to confess.' The religious, then, whose case we have been supposing, would do well to give the matter serious consideration, and to employ a humble and careful scrutiny of their thoughts, intentions, words, doings, and omissions, in order to assure themselves that they have not deceived themselves as to the condition of their conscience.

As a rule, religious go to Confession once a week. Strive to derive the full benefit that should result from this weekly approach to the holy sacrament of Penance. Let us now consider what has to be done, if you would approach it profitably.

Your examination of conscience should not be a scrupulous one, yet it should be careful and effective; it should lay bare whatever has been actually sinful. It should be your endeavour, without deceiving yourselves, to discover every sin that you have committed, and to repent sincerely of every one. You must not be disconcerted, in disposing yourselves for Confession, by the thought which may come to your minds that you may offend in the same way again. It is quite probable that, owing to your frailty, you may fall again; for God has not given you assurance

that you shall be preserved from every fall. Although His grace is sufficient to preserve you from all sin, there may yet be a weakness in your co-operation with His grace. But such a probability should not be a bar to your repentance or to your firm purpose of amendment; and therefore you should confess all the faults that you habitually commit. Your humble confession of them will obtain their forgiveness, and will also help you in your struggle against such faults.

In how many ways you are liable to fall since human frailty is so great. It may be useful to suggest some points for your examination.

Do you perhaps sin against humility by deliberate self-esteem; by referring to yourselves, and not to God, the success of any of your labours; by speaking with pride and pleasure of what you have done in order to draw praise; by a haughty or disdainful mannerism towards others; by performing your actions or fulfilling your duties with vanity and self-complacency? Do you perhaps sin against charity, by unkind remarks, or by criticisms intended to give pain; by trying to wound or humble your neighbour; by bearing dislike or malice; by revealing or repeating the faults of another; by making the failings of others the subject of conversation; by rash and unjust judgments formed of another's character and conduct; by marked want of consideration for others; or by personal disrespect? Do you perhaps sin against meekness by unreasonable cross-temper, by fits of spite or anger? Do you sin against obedience by any act or conduct contrary to the known wish

or direction of your superiors; by stubbornness in following your own way when your superiors have disapproved of it, or by secret disobedience? Do you sin against holy poverty by purchasing, giving away, or lending anything without the required permission, or by receiving various gifts without the superior's sanction or knowledge? Do you sin in any way by giving bad advice, fomenting disunion, creating dissatisfaction, sloth, disedification, neglect of duty, or disregard of rule? Or, finally, are you ever guilty of carelessness or disrespect in your prayers or other spiritual exercises, or in receiving the Holy Sacraments?

These are some of the matters that present themselves for examination when you are preparing for Confession. Be on your guard against self-righteousness, self-importance, or self-esteem at a time when humility is so necessary: 'If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves.' Recognize, rather, your faultiness, and try with all care and humility to gauge its true measure. Is this what you do? Do you try to convince yourselves of what the real malice of sin is? Learn of holy David: 'Wash me yet more from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my iniquity, and my sin is always before me' (Ps. l. 4, 5). Are there not phases of your faultiness that you do not fully realize?

You are sufficiently conscious of it to admit that you have sinned; but, alas, how often your view of your sins, though they be only venial, is very superficial! You know that you do not see them

as God sees them; and, at least, you should be willing to admit your inadequate perception of your real sinfulness. Your faith should teach you that, whatever it is, it stands completely revealed and fully known to God; and that through it you are indebted to Him beyond all comprehension—first, for His merciful forbearance, and, secondly, for the tender mercy He has ever displayed towards you. In the case of your sins, venial though they may be—say, of wilful disobedience, or irreverence, of deliberate uncharitableness, or impatience—the God of infinite Sanctity sees in all their reality, and measures in the scales of infinite Justice, the height of the ingratitude, the depth of the malice, the breadth of the unworthiness of intention, the true character of the weakness displayed, the severity of the wound to the soul, and all the other present consequences, and, finally, the extent of the punishment deserved. Do we ever reflect upon any of these phases of deliberate sins? We have read of Saints who, during a lifetime, have lamented some slight fault, deeming that it should be bewailed with many groans of remorse, and tears of sorrow and repentance. In what light, then, must our sins appear under the all-seeing eye of God? Should we not shudder for ourselves because of our ignorance and thoughtlessness? And might we not pray as David did, saying: 'The sins of my youth and my ignorances do not remember. According to Thy mercy remember Thou me' (Ps. xxiv. 7)? Has not our Lord need to supplicate His Heavenly Father for us, as for the Jews who crucified Him:

'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do' (St. Luke xxiii. 34)? But whatever our faultiness may be, we may draw comfort from our faith in the tenderness of the Divine mercy. There is more than a gleam of light and hope when the infinite mercy of God shines upon us.

To continue. You know that a mere knowledge of your sins, and the historic declaration of them, is not all that is required. An essential disposition for their forgiveness is that you have sorrow for them. There are various degrees of such sorrow, some more perfect than others. Then your confession of your sins should be a penitent acknowledgment of them. You should therefore be careful to excite yourself to contrition. To do this you may give more or less time to such considerations as the holiness, goodness, and love of God, the sacred sufferings of our Blessed Lord, and the tenderness of His Sacred Heart; the punishment which the infinite justice of God must measure out to every sin; the great mercy that has already been shown you. To bring yourselves to a proper disposition of sorrow, you may also call to mind your special obligations to God as religious, and your special indebtedness in view of the abundance of the graces conferred upon you; for the greater your indebtedness, the greater must appear your ingratitude and the unseemliness of your sin.

In further preparation, besides some form of act of contrition, you might employ some suitable verses of the psalms, such as: 'Have mercy on me, O God, according to Thy great mercy: and accord-

ing to the multitude of Thy tender mercies blot out my iniquity. Wash me yet more from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin' (Ps. l.). Do not omit to cast yourselves at the feet of your blessed Immaculate Mother, the 'Mother of Mercy,' the 'Refuge of Sinners,' to beg of her to obtain for you the grace to make a good and profitable Confession. Address yourselves fervently to the Sacred Heart of our Lord, to draw from that fountain of all grace the graces you need and the fulness of the divine forgiveness.

Be careful about this part of your preparation. When it is finished, then with all hope and confidence approach the sacred tribunal, taking care to preserve your fervour and recollectedness.

You are about to receive a fresh proof of God's mercy; the merits of Christ's sacred Passion are about once more to be applied to your souls; God is about to operate with the priestly minister of the sacrament; the Sacred Heart is to be consoled, and our Blessed Lady and the Angels and Saints are to rejoice (St. Luke xv. 10); your soul is to be cleansed, and it will receive a new lustre of sanctifying grace; your feet are to be strengthened, and new energy is to be given to your steps, that you may walk more perfectly in the way. O sacred channel of grace and source of so much good!

Make your confession humbly and with sufficient exactitude; do not gloss over your weakness; do not conceal the true state of your guilt; avoid mentioning what is not a sin; do not exaggerate your guilt. Remember that you do not kneel before

the minister of the sacrament to manifest how good you are, or to condone in any way your guilt, but you kneel there as penitents to make known wherein and to what extent you have fallen, in order that God may pardon all the faults which you acknowledge to have committed. Venial sins which you knowingly and advisedly conceal as to the kind, degree, or number—if they be not necessarily implied in what you confess—do not fall directly but indirectly under the absolution that is to be judicially pronounced by the confessor. You do not need to be reminded that wilfully to conceal a mortal sin in Confession would be to profane the sacrament and to add to your guilt; to conceal a venial sin would not have this sacrilegious result.

When you have made the confession of your faults, it behoves you to receive in a spirit of gratitude the penance that is imposed. Then once more give yourselves to sentiments of true sorrow, while the priest, the vicegerent of Christ, pronounces the form of absolution; receiving, in a spirit of faith, the assurance of your pardon as though from the lips of our Divine Lord Himself. You will then retire, to return thanks to God for the graces you have received; to give expression in your fervent prayers to fresh loyalty and to a renewed determination to be more circumspect and more faithful; and, finally, you will perform the sacramental penance that has been imposed by the confessor. As a conclusion to your devotions after confession, place yourselves once more under the special protection of the Blessed Virgin; also add some psalm

or canticle of thanksgiving, such as the 'Magnificat,' or the 'Divine Praises.'

If unhappily you have had the misfortune to fall into any sin of particular gravity, or into any that has given scandal to others, then it would be well, in addition to the sacramental Penance, to resolve upon some special voluntary satisfaction which you will perform by way of atonement. Let this voluntary satisfaction be some act of self-denial, or some extra devotional exercise. Have the days of such atonements gone by? Has the spirit of Penance deteriorated? If so, so much the worse for those in whose breast it languishes. Men wish God to be generous in forgiving, while on their part they strive to accomplish their reconciliation at the lowest possible cost to themselves. Is it surprising that so many fall again?

What we have been considering about Confession should remind you of what is required if you would make your weekly Confession with fervour and profit. What happy results in purity of conscience should result from it! Just as vessels of gold and silver are kept clean and bright by constant rubbing and polishing, so, we may say, is the soul preserved in purity and holiness by frequent Confession. What a valuable preparation, too, your weekly Confession is for assisting devoutly every day at the adorable Sacrifice of the Mass, and for receiving Holy Communion daily, or on the prescribed days! What a help it is to you to keep you fervent and dutiful religious! And, finally, what a magnificent preparation it is in order to obtain for you the

inestimable grace of a happy death! It is like a weekly preparation for death. If you endeavoured to make every Confession as though it were your last, then indeed you should, after every Confession, be in dispositions to yield up your soul to God.

How pure the soul should be that is to enjoy in this life the sanctifying communications of the Holy Spirit; the soul to which our Lord will by special graces espouse Himself, and draw after Him by the odour of the ointments of His love and His virtues; the soul that aspires to be united to God in eternity, and to follow the Lamb singing the new canticle! Oh, abase yourselves in spirit as the Saints have done, and deem yourselves far removed from the sanctity that your Divine Lord demands of you. Go to Him as to the Good Shepherd, with your spiritual ailments, that He may cure them; go often, go willingly. Let your faith discern what your senses are unable to detect. Behind the screen of what falls under observation in the holy sacrament of Penance, there, all unseen, is that loving Shepherd; there He opens His Sacred Wounds to bathe your soul in the Precious Blood. The grace imparted to your soul by that sacrament is more than all the Angels and Saints could merit for you or bestow. It is the hand of God that touches you, and heals you. O divine efficacy of the touch of Jesus! Your Confession is finished; arise. Your sins have been forgiven, your soul has been purified, you are made dearer to God.

Be resolved, then, to approach the holy sacrament of Penance with all possible care. God, Who

designs it as a channel of special grace and a valuable means of your sanctification, will second your efforts. He will reward your fidelity by imparting to you a greater purity of soul, a keener discernment of what is pleasing to Him, and a greater desire of accomplishing it. He will bestow more efficacious help in the temptations and difficulties to which you are exposed, and a more perfect spirit of religious piety. All this should inspire you with a sense of confidence like to that expressed by the penitent David, when he sang: 'Thy mercy will follow me all the days of my life . . . that I may dwell in the house of the Lord unto length of days' (Ps. xxii. 6).

XIII.

INTERIOR AND EXTERIOR LIFE.

'I live, now not I; but Christ liveth in me.'—GAL. ii. 20.

THERE is in you a twofold life—a life that attaches you to this world, and a life that is especially related to the world to come. The one is the life by which you breathe and grow, and use the frame and faculties belonging to a human being; the other is the life by which you know, love, and serve God, and you term it your supernatural life. The first may be said to decrease, to lessen, and to become extinct; while the second should ever flourish and increase. The first you lose by death, but the second you should never lose. The true servant of God is willing to sacrifice the first, rather than to imperil the second by mortal sin. How highly, then, you should value the supernatural life, and protect and foster it! The relation of this life to the world to come is so intimate and so necessary that it will secure your everlasting happiness in that world, and, under God's unfettered goodness, it will regulate the degree of glory that you will enjoy in the kingdom of heaven. The supernatural life may be termed the life of man's sanctification. It wears as many complexions, or exists in as many degrees, as there are vocations, and even as there are souls,

for all have not received the same measure of grace; 'but to every one,' St. Paul says, 'is given grace, according to the measure of the giving of Christ' (Eph. iv. 7). In another place St. Paul tells us that we are 'the house' of Christ, 'if we hold fast the confidence and glory of hope unto the end' (Heb. iii. 6). We are then the house of Christ, not inasmuch as we live, breathe, and move, but inasmuch as we are united to Christ by supernatural grace and virtue. Thus we find St. Paul, after he had declared that he was nailed to the cross with Christ, breaking forth, as in an ecstasy of spiritual union, into that expression of its intensity: 'I live, now not I; but Christ liveth in me.' Do you not all wish that, corresponding fully with grace, that is, with God's designs in your regard, you might express yourselves as fervently and as truly as did St. Paul, in the same sense? May Christ ever dwell in you!

Now, just as the house has to be built with both exterior and interior adornment, and with due regard to both, according to the position and requirements of its owner, so should it be with the spiritual edifice in man. If this be so, how beautifully adorned yours should be! St. Peter, addressing all the faithful without distinction, says: 'Be you also as living stones built up, a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ' (1 St. Pet. ii. 5). Your life should correspond with the holiness and with the duties of your vocation. In its exterior, in its interior, it should be all that becomes devout religious. It should be this, not in the exterior only,

not in the interior only, but in both. This is a view which you should impress well upon your minds during this retreat.

Because the exterior life, as far as depends upon yourselves, receives its mould from the interior, of which it is a certain manifestation, I invite your consideration, first of all, to what your interior life should be.

In the first place, you should be actuated by a lively faith.

How important faith is to you, not only as being necessary for your salvation, but also as your guide and moving power in all you do! You should be impregnated with it. You need it for yourselves, you need it that you may help others. It is by faith that you learn, and come to realize and appreciate, your relations with Almighty God, and the marvellous results of the Incarnation and Redemption, and the triumph of grace over sin. St. Paul says: 'God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Christ Jesus' (2 Cor. iv. 6).

It is by faith that you appreciate the true value of many actions which others regard as useless and unprofitable; by faith, too, that you realize the benefit of sufferings and trials, of humility and patience. It is faith which teaches you the necessity and value of piety, and the merit of the holy state of religion. Finally, it is faith which unfolds to your delighted vision, though you see it but dimly now, the everlasting glory destined for you in the world

to come. You cannot do without faith, for it is the very groundwork of all religion, the gateway to the supernatural. If all the faithful should possess it, and build up their spiritual life upon it, in you it should glow with special brightness and force. Since 'every best gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights' (St. James i. 17), ask God to strengthen and increase your faith, that it may not be unreal or fanciful, but strong, clear, active, penetrating, and sustaining.

An important element in the spiritual life, and an indispensable adornment of the soul, is humility. There are two kinds of knowledge which you should cultivate in order to acquire the perfection of this virtue; the first is the knowledge of God, and the second is the knowledge of yourselves. Of these two kinds of knowledge is begotten humility, the foundation of the moral virtues. Study to know yourselves; remove all delusions and all obstacles to this salutary knowledge. The true knowledge of yourselves will not reveal to you any greatness, nobility of character, or other excellence; but it will convince you of your faultiness, your unworthiness, your nothingness, your infidelities, your weakness, your baseness, and your ingratitude. How many among you are in possession of this knowledge, and are really persuaded of the truth of this picture of yourselves? How few value such knowledge as this! Perhaps fewer again are impressed by it. Religious should be humble; they are servants of the Lord. Humility should reign in their heart; then would it be a noble heart, one dear to God; it

would be as precious metal ready to be moulded into the richest vessel; it would be as a field of good ground ready to yield a golden harvest. 'He hath regarded the humility of His handmaid . . . and hath exalted the humble' (St. Luke i. 48, 52). Solomon says: 'Glory shall uphold the humble of spirit' (Prov. xxix. 23). This is the strong and solid foundation upon which shall be built a stately mansion; it is as the rock upon which the wise man built his house (St. Matt. vii. 24). All spiritual writers, following the teaching of our Lord and the doctrine of the Holy Scriptures, insist upon the necessity of humility. You do not take a different view of its necessity. Look upon it as necessary as well for the success of your works, as for your own sanctification, and for your advancement in virtue, for God bestows His grace upon the humble (St. James iv. 6), and blesses their works. It has always been the humble and not the proud whom He has used in the accomplishment of His great purposes. In order to acquire this admirable and precious virtue, study to know yourselves. What indeed are we? The Holy Ghost has declared: 'All flesh is grass, and all the glory thereof as the flower of the field' (Isa. xl. 6). If you study to know yourselves, what will you discover? As your grace and true excellence are from God, you will discover that of yourselves you are nothing. When you have acquired this knowledge and become convinced of its truth, then will you begin to be humble. Of this salutary knowledge the 'Spiritual Combat' says: 'O heavenly knowledge, which makes us happy

here, and glorious hereafter! O admirable light, piercing through the darkness of this nothing, in order to enlighten our souls, and raise our minds to God! O precious but unknown jewel, which shineth through the filth of our sins! O nothing, the contemplation of which puts all things in our power!'

Just as faith is the basis of supernatural life, so is humility the basis of supernatural virtue; if, therefore, you would be spiritual, you must love it, and seek to be humble. Away, then, with arrogance, self-conceit, vain-glory, self-complacency, and all the tribe of miserable and empty delusions about your own excellence! Your spirit of humility will not, however, be left unrewarded; for our Lord said to St. Margaret Mary: 'The more you retire into your own nothingness, the more does My Greatness lower itself to find you.'

If you have faith and sincere and profound humility, the interior life has its two staunchest qualities; great things may be expected of you; you will run in the course of your sanctification; the Holy Ghost will enrich you with His gifts. But the interior of Christ's house, which is your soul, needs further adornment. You must, further, seek to embellish your soul with piety and charity. The one will be your agreeable homage to God, while the other will lead you to do your duty to your neighbour.

St. Paul says: 'Be ye filled with the Holy Spirit, speaking to yourselves in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual canticles, singing and making melody in your hearts to the Lord' (Eph. v. 18, 19). This is a description of Christian piety. It embraces more

than reverence, respect, and dutiful submission; for Christian piety, over and above this, is a spirit of love and devotedness; it is the secret spring of the lives of zeal and self-abnegation, and of the deeds of heroism, that have made Christianity the theme of praise in every age and in every land. Where would be the splendour of worship in the Catholic Church, the glorious calendar of Saints, the admirable array of religious Orders and Institutes, the holy works and institutions for the relief and consolation of humanity and for the amelioration of society, if it were not for pious pontiffs, pious bishops and priests, pious founders, pious men and women? These things would not be, if it had not been for the spirit of piety thriving in the Church. What, then, shall we say if in these days religious, fallen away from the spirit of their Institute and from their own first fervour, are to be found with hearts as cold as the shores of Lapland, and as sterile as the fig-tree which fell under the curse of our Saviour? Our Lord said: 'The true adorers shall adore the Father in spirit and in truth. For the Father also seeketh such to adore Him' (St. John iv. 23); He demands fervent adorers, worshippers whose homage comes from pious hearts. Foremost among these worshippers should be found religious. Have you not experienced exceeding goodness on God's part? Would it not, then, be to your shame if you were wanting in that fervent piety which would place you in that enviable position?

Press forward to draw nearer every day to your Divine Lord by a tender but solid piety. Pray to

the Holy Ghost for this most excellent gift, that your service of God may be, as the fragrant sacrifice, acceptable in His sight (1 St. Pet. ii. 5).

Your interior adornment will not be complete without the golden ornament of charity or love of your neighbour. You have the happiness of belonging to the Christian family; you have the privileged vocation to be members of a Religious Institute. There must be a golden and glorious bond uniting you all in holy fellowship, and the strength of this bond must proceed from your interior dispositions and feelings. Outward show of charity will have but little effect and short endurance if it does not result from a deep-seated charity in the heart. You must love your neighbour as yourselves for God's sake: this charity and your love of God should have their place, side by side, in your heart. In fact, the love of our neighbour is only a phase of the love of God; our charity towards our neighbour is not entertained only with a view to our gain or advantage; but it is a noble and sublime affection, rising above self-interest, and resulting from our love of God. It is God's will that we bear this charity towards our neighbour; and St. John says: 'He that loveth not, abideth in death' (1 St. John iii. 14). You will obtain this interior disposition of supernatural charity by prayer; it is a great grace. You should foster it: it may be only a little spark at first, but it may be blown into a great flame. How pleasing this virtue will make you to our Lord! If, alas! there are dissensions, jealousies, coldnesses, dislikes, estrangements and misunder-

standings in your relations with your neighbour, the explanation will be found in the fact that interior charity is wanting. 'Above all these things,' wrote St. Paul, 'have charity, which is the bond of perfection. And let the peace of Christ rejoice in your hearts, wherein also you are called in one body' (Col. iii. 14, 15). St. Paul describes in another place all the qualities and manifestations of this exquisite virtue (1 Cor. xiii.); and elsewhere he says: 'He that loveth his neighbour, hath fulfilled the law' (Rom. xiii. 8). Our Lord, by His last will and testament, bequeathed charity to His followers as their insignia; and does not the rule of your holy Institute inspire the practice of it? Strive then, as you wish to be devout followers of our Lord, and true children of the religious family that has adopted you, to embellish your inmost soul with this golden and shining ornament of charity.

We have considered only four main features of the interior life—faith, humility, piety, and charity: they portray, as it were, the height and depth and breadth that should be attained. Many other dimensions might also be given to complete the drawing; but they would bear in some way upon what we have thus far sketched. Look, then, upon these interior dispositions, not only and not simply as desirable, but also as necessary to you, for they are so; and seek to develop them more and more in your souls. So doing you will advance in perfection, and become more pleasing to God, and thus fulfil more perfectly your Christian and religious vocation.

In the 44th Psalm it is said: 'All the glory of the

king's daughter is within in golden borders,' and then is added: 'clothed round about with varieties.' Perfection does not consist in only the interior—that is, in the virtue and excellence of the heart and dispositions; there must also be a counterpart in exterior conduct—that is, in an edifying life and good works. Thus our Lord says: 'So let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father Who is in heaven' (St. Matt. v. 16). When St. Paul said: 'I live, now not I; but Christ liveth in me,' he spoke of his union with Christ in his heart and spirit; but there was also the manifestation of the grace of that union in his life and works. If his exterior conduct had not an intimate correspondence with his interior grace, there would have been a sad contradiction, which would have deprived his words of their intended meaning. Let not religious, when their exterior conduct is faulty, excuse themselves under the plea that they give more attention to the interior life—that would look like hypocrisy. The exterior, if genuine, manifests the interior.

You would do well, therefore, to examine what your outward conduct is in your community life, in discharging the offices and duties connected with the works of your Institute, and finally, in your social relations. It should, in its entire and constant bearing, be religious and edifying.

A rule of life to be followed by every member of your Institute is to be found in your holy rules. In the interior of your houses you are required to edify one another by following this wise rule of life; this

compliance with the rule is termed 'religious observance.' Time and place are regulated for prayer and meditation, for hearing Holy Mass, for Holy Communion and thanksgiving, for Rosary and other devotions, and for spiritual reading. There are regulations about your going out and your coming in, about the privacy of your cells, about your meals and recreations, and about silence. There should be a sacredness about your respect for religious observance; it has ecclesiastical sanction; it is the yoke that sanctifies your daily life; it is the mould that gives the shape to your exterior life, while at the same time it helps to form your character and impart a religious tone and spirit. Religious founders and ascetical writers have always insisted upon this observance: in a sense, it may be said to be to religious life what clothing is to the body. It is not enough to feed the body; it must also be clothed so that it may retain the heat generated by food; then the style and quality of the attire indicate the wearer's station in life. The interior grace of religion needs to be protected and abetted by religious observance. The particular acts and requirements of this observance indicate the Institute to which the religious belong. It is not for you to alter or modify the rule of life laid down for you in your Constitutions, or to say that other Institutes have fewer or more religious exercises or observances; but, loyal to your own Institute, and true to your vocation, you should strive to be exact in all the observance that is demanded of you.

But do you perhaps fail, without sufficient reason,

to rise with the community? Do you shorten your meditations, and even sometimes omit them? Do you absent yourselves from other community devotions? Do you give yourselves the habit of breaking silence? Do you ever enter the cells of other religious to air your grievances, or hold unnecessary conversation? Do you observe what your rule lays down about seeking various permissions from your superiors, and about obtaining their approval of what you undertake? Do you cause others to break the rules and regulations? Alas, how much valuable time is wasted, and how much disedification is at times given by religious who have fallen from their first fervour! For the love you have of your vocation and the respect you have for the holy state of religion, strive to correct whatever your shortcomings may be in religious observance; endeavour by your fidelity in keeping the rule to bring down God's blessing, not only upon yourselves individually, but also upon your community and upon your holy Institute.

What is your exterior conduct in carrying on the various works of your Institute? It should be edifying, exact, and even zealous or devoted. How useful are the various works which the many Institutes in the Church carry on! These Institutes devote themselves chiefly to the spiritual and corporal works of mercy; they have the blessing of God and His Church; they not only become benefactors to society, but they also assist those under their care in the work of their salvation. But how much depends upon the devotedness and edification of the

individual members of these Institutes! Weigh, then, the importance of the works in which you are engaged, and let all fulfil carefully and conscientiously the duties marked out for them. There should be a charity in your bearing and a kindliness in your speech that should inspire confidence and esteem, and just as much reserve in your demeanour as will command respect. Your religious sense will tell you to avoid foolish levity, ostentation, inconsiderateness, show of temper, excessive talking, briskness, and severity. Let not the cause of religion suffer in any way by such faultiness of manner, nor yet by neglect or carelessness. The sacred cause of religion and of charity is the cause of grace and of God. Be devoted to it; promote it by every means of which you are capable within the scope of your vocation. 'In doing good,' says St. Paul, 'let us not fail; for in due time we shall reap, not failing. Therefore, whilst we have time, let us work good to all men, but especially to those who are of the household of the faith' (Gal. vi. 9, 10).

It remains for you, lastly, to examine your exterior conduct in your relations with seculars. You must be religious at all times and in all places. Religion is not to be put on and taken off like a garment; you are wedded to it. You have relations with seculars who come to see you; your works bring them about you; sometimes you have to visit them. Happily religious respect themselves and they are respected by others. Still, you have to be on your guard not to cause remark by showing undue relish for gossip or conversation of a worldly

character; you should be careful to keep your own counsel about the affairs of your community; you should not allow yourselves to become entangled in matters that do not concern you; you should check levity, lest it become dissipating; you have to turn a deaf ear to all scandals, to stories that are being spread, and to praise offered to yourselves. If, through any weakness, you were to act otherwise, not only will the fault weigh upon you, but, be sure of it, the persons who have led you into it will remark your weakness, and will be disedified. Religious cannot be too circumspect.

And now we will draw our considerations to a close. You must be convinced that unless you give due attention to both your interior life—that life of yours which is hidden in the soul—and to your exterior life—that life of yours which falls under your neighbour's observation—you will fail to reach the perfection that is demanded of you. You should also be convinced that if your exterior conduct is to be edifying and in keeping with the requirements of your calling, the interior life must be formed to the right spirit. Cultivate that spirit; strive, by the aid of God's grace, to adorn the interior of the house with a lively faith, with humility, and with piety and charity. Herein is real and solid virtue. And as all things come by prayer, ask our Lord to build up the spiritual edifice, the edifice of your sanctification; ask Him to aid you by His grace to give the house its full interior adornment and its becoming exterior adornment; that you too may be able to say with St. Paul: ' I

live, now not I; but Christ liveth in me.' Beseech Him, as your Divine Lord and Master, to make you more devout in His service, more zealous for His glory, and more earnest about your religious perfection. For, ' unless the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it ' (Ps. cxxvi. 1).

FIFTH DAY.

XIV.

TEACHINGS OF THE PASSION.

'Christ also suffered for us, leaving you an example that you should follow His steps.'—1 St. Pet. ii. 21.

Our Divine Lord invites you to walk in His footsteps, to imitate His virtues. He deigns to address you tenderly, if not pleadingly, saying, 'Learn of Me.' Perhaps, even, His words are meant as a command. You study the lesson of His sacred life, His teachings in Bethlehem, in Egypt, in Nazareth, and in His missionary career. With what a fund of instruction they supply you! Can you tire of the study of these lessons? Well will it be, if you learn them and appreciate them. But come now to Gethsemani, to the Pretorium, to Calvary; come to the outpouring of the Precious Blood; to the wounding, the bruising, the sacrificing of the Lamb of God; come to see the Man of Sorrows (Isa. liii. 3). Say with the spouse in the Canticles: 'I will go to the mountain of myrrh' (iv. 6). Has Christ any followers who do not love the sacred Passion, and who are not moved by the picture of so much suffering? It is not pretended that our Lord's

love for man varied at different times during His life, or that it was stronger or greater in Gethsemani than in Nazareth; but it would appear in our eyes especially accentuated during the sufferings and ignominy endured so generously and so patiently in His sacred Passion. 'Christ hath loved us,' St. Paul wrote to the Ephesians, 'and hath delivered Himself for us, an oblation and a sacrifice to God for an odour of sweetness' (v. 2). We have evidence, as well, of God's will that the events of the Passion should have a special place in our memory and in our devotion, as of the piety of the Apostles towards this deep mystery of suffering, in the lengthened and detailed narration in which the history of the sacred Passion has been handed down to us in the holy Gospels. Should not this convince us that we are expected to find in it many lessons for our instruction? and should not the harrowing scenes in which these lessons are portrayed impress them vividly and deeply upon our mind and heart?

When God appeared to Moses in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush, Moses exclaimed: 'I will go and see this great sight' (Exod. iii. 3), and he drew near to do so. This same God it is Who, in the sacred humanity of the Second Adorable Person, displays Himself before us in the fire of the tribulation of the Passion—therefore in a manner even more wonderful than His appearance in the burning bush. He is gashed, and bruised, and defiled with spittle; He is covered with the blood of His own countless wounds; a crown of thorns pierces His sacred brow; nails are driven through His hands

and feet; He hangs upon a cross. 'We have seen Him,' exclaimed the prophet, 'and there was no sightliness . . . despised, and the most abject of men, a man of sorrows' (Isa. liii. 2, 3). Yet this is He in Whom 'dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead corporally' (Col. ii. 9). Come, then, and see this great sight. But why should you study it during your retreat? It is because you ought to examine what your dispositions and conduct are with regard to conformity with the Divine Will, with regard to patience, and with regard to the love of the cross. Your perfection does not consist only in action, but also in supporting trials, sufferings, and contradictions. 'Yet so,' St. Paul says, 'if we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified with Him' (Rom. viii. 17). Religious are to be found who are willing to spend themselves in external work, but who prove themselves very weak when their plans are upset, when they meet with opposition, when they are kept from their usual occupations by sickness, or by the wish of their superiors. They eagerly follow our Lord in His missionary journeys, but have little love for the path of the Passion.

As a first lesson from the sacred Passion study conformity with the Divine Will. When our Lord foretold His apostles the many things which He was about to suffer, St. Peter would not hear of it. He was unwilling to see his Lord reduced to such straits, or even to believe it possible that such trials should overtake Him; and he exclaimed: 'Lord, be it far from Thee: this shall not come unto Thee.'

Our Lord, Whose meat it was to do the will of His Heavenly Father (St. John iv. 34), gave St. Peter to understand how wrong it would be to oppose God's designs, addressing to him this reprimand: 'Go behind Me, Satan, thou art a scandal unto Me: because thou savourest not the things that are of God, but the things that are of men' (St. Matt. xvi. 23). It was in the decrees of God that our Lord should suffer; our Lord therefore entered fully into God's designs, with a perfect conformity of will. What befalls you is in accordance with the Divine decrees; and you, too, in imitation of our Lord, should strive always to conform your will to the Divine Will. But go to Gethsemani, to witness our Lord's actual conformity with His Heavenly Father's decrees concerning His sufferings. The chalice of His Passion is prepared: the time is now at hand to drink it. How does our Blessed Saviour now act? He communes with His Divine Father in prayer. With what object? To emphasize His conformity; to beg that, if that bitter chalice must be drunk, His Father will not withdraw it, but leave it with Him that He may drink it to the dregs. In what light has the Passion before Him appeared, and what effect has the picture produced upon Him, before He utters His prayer of submission and perfect conformity? He beheld the Passion in all the cruel details of its various scenes and countless sufferings. Since moments of pain seem like so many hours, what a prolonged agony must have appeared those many hours which were to pass before His death. Nothing was lost sight of.

He in that hour of patient prayer could count all His bleeding wounds, and fathom the depths of His anguish. He beheld all the sins of the world for which He was to atone, and He measured out the full atonement that was exacted of Him; He realized all the meaning of the appalling prophecies that foretold His sufferings and ignominy, and in spirit He witnessed the profuse shedding of the Precious Blood and the painful ebbing away of life. All this and much more was in His mind; and He permitted it to produce in Him the most realistic effect. 'He began to fear and to be heavy,' and He said to Peter, James, and John: 'My soul is sorrowful even unto death.' He then moved forward and fell flat on the ground, and prayed, saying: 'My Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from Me. Nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt.'; and His sweat became as drops of blood, trickling down upon the ground; and being in agony, He prayed the longer. A second and a third time He repeated the same prayer: 'Not My will but Thine be done.' He uttered this noble and generous prayer of resignation with a full knowledge of the sufferings before Him, and fully disposed to endure them all, if only His Heavenly Father so willed. Dwell on and admire this picture of perfect conformity with the will of God under the most unprecedented circumstances, and study well the lesson it teaches.

You are not without your trials; but in presence of the sacred Passion—of the terrible sufferings endured by our Blessed Saviour for your sake—they are dwarfed into insignificance. Yet to you, and

perhaps even in themselves, they are severe. In what spirit do you bear them? Do you conform yourselves, under them, with the Divine Will fully and generously? Does the desire to do so present itself to you and sway you? Ask yourselves if you have any will but the Divine Will in all that befalls you in life, in the arrangements of your superiors, in the circumstances of your employment, in the derangement of your time and convenience, in the uncongenial character of your surroundings, in the variations of the temperature and of the seasons, in the vicissitudes of life in your family and among your friends in the world, in the daily occurrences around you? Your dispositions in your worship of God will be faulty, if you do not seek at all times, in all places, and in all circumstances, to bring your will into conformity with the Divine Will; and, be assured, the path of this dutiful conformity is not only the path of perfection, but it is also the path of true peace. Look often upon your Divine Model: 'Christ also suffered for us, leaving you an example that you should follow His steps.' Follow Him as faithfully as you can in desiring only to do and to suffer all that God appoints and permits.

You have contemplated our Lord at Gethsemani; come now to the Pretorium, and, with all reverence, look upon Him in His sufferings there, and learn of Him how to be patient. He has been roughly seized upon, treated worse than any robber, and brought before Annas and Caiphas. Brutal men have spit in His adorable face and buffeted Him, and struck His face with the palms of their hands;

they have derided Him and bid Him prophesy; they have spent their malice and their cruelty upon Him during a long night. And now it is morning; He is tightly bound; He stands, surrounded by enemies and false accusers, before Pilate. How truly He is called the innocent Lamb of God! Accusations are heaped up against Him; He is calumniated. How does He bear this trial? How does he defend Himself? How does He repel and disprove the calumnious assertions of His bitter, unscrupulous, and relentless enemies? He is silent. The prophecy of Isaias is fulfilled: 'He shall be led as a sheep to the slaughter, and shall be dumb as a lamb before His shearers, and He shall not open His mouth' (Isa. liii. 7). He is rejected for Barabbas, a notorious criminal. Does He protest? Does He aver His proved and acknowledged innocence? Does He remind the Jewish people of the wonders which, in their behalf, He has wrought among them? Does He upbraid them with their base ingratitude? No; He maintains a composure and a silence that astonish Pilate and all around Him.

And now begin the most cruel of the sufferings of the Passion. Pilate gives our Lord over to the soldiers to be scourged. How little we know of that prolonged scourging! The sacred Flesh is cut, gashed, lacerated, and finally beaten into one massive wound; the Precious and Adorable Blood is sprinkled on every side. All human feeling seems to have deserted the soldiers: perhaps they ceased the scourging only when they feared that our Lord was about to die. We look on in spirit; our feelings

are those of inexpressible pity and horror; but we hear no cry, no, not even a moan: Jesus is silent. O miraculous patience!

Surely we are now at the end of this stage of the sacred Passion. But no. Fresh insults are now heaped upon our meek and exhausted Saviour. His head is crowned with sharp thorns, a purple robe is put on Him; He is mocked, and many attendants take their turn at spitting upon Him and deriding Him. 'Behold the Man!' Jesus, all-patient and unresisting, the cruel thorns piercing His head and tender brow, the blood trickling down His sacred countenance, is still silent. But what is this excited cry that is taken up by all the multitude, and that now echoes through the Pretorium? A fiendish enthusiasm has seized upon the crowd, which seeks to overturn the scales of Justice, and which succeeds in doing it. 'Crucify Him, crucify Him!' is heard on all sides. 'Why,' expostulates Pilate, 'what evil hath He done?' 'Let Him be crucified!' is the persistent answer. 'What,' rejoins Pilate, 'shall I crucify your King?' 'Crucify Him, crucify Him!' is the unyielding and relentless reply.

In all these scenes our Lord maintains an unalterable patience. You have not only to work, you have also to suffer. This is the model which you must place before yourselves, to preserve you from complaints, murmurs, repinings, and reluctance. Of how many precious merits such faults as these have perhaps already deprived you! You have to take up your cross daily. In what spirit do you accept and endure the various annoyances, disap-

pointments, and bodily and mental sufferings met with in the course of each day? Do you look upon it as a grievance to have these slight trials to bear?

Should you not burn with a more ardent desire of being conformable to your Lord in suffering? The Holy Writer says: 'Take all that shall be brought upon thee: and in thy sorrow endure, and in thy humiliation keep patience' (Ecclus. ii. 4). You should be as the gold and silver that are tried in the fire; but strive by patience to come well out of the trial, that you may be approved. Under your trials you must not look to nature for support or guidance: nature will be fretful and restless, and the mind will lose its composure. Therefore must you withhold the intemperate word, and check the hasty murmur. 'In your patience,' our Lord said, 'you shall possess your souls' (St. Luke xxi. 19). Strive to recollect yourselves, then, under your trials; pray; look to God for the grace you need. Holy David said: 'Be thou, O my soul, subject to God: for from Him is my patience' (Ps. lxi. 6). In the time of trial, when you have recollected yourselves and prayed, turn in spirit to your King and Saviour in His sacred Passion, and see how He is fixing His eyes upon you, to know if you are willing to be His companions in suffering; brace up your spirit with resolution and devotedness; and ask Him to strengthen you, and give you patience. This second lesson, then, which you are to learn from the sacred Passion, is one of patience.

You may think that you have progressed far enough in the passive stages of perfection, when you have reached the point at which you have learned that you should ever conform your will with the Divine Will, and be patient under the trials of life; but there is yet another lesson proposed to generous souls, which you would do well to study. We will go to Calvary to learn it. It is the love of the cross. Even though you should not follow the footsteps of the Saints to this further height of perfection in the imitation of Christ crucified, you may yet look up at it, and acknowledge in all humility that you have not reached the virtue of the Saints; and perhaps grace may yet touch your hearts to make you aspire to this love of the cross. Go to Calvary to meditate upon the meaning of St. Peter's words: 'Christ also suffered for us, leaving you an example that you should follow His steps.'

You reach Calvary when the cross has been raised with the Divine Victim nailed to it. From all eternity this death had been decreed, foreknown, elected, and accepted; therefore must we say that Jesus loved the cross. He has not confined His thoughts only to His own sufferings and ignominy upon it; but He has embraced in His thoughts and affections the whole scope, bearings, and results of this mystery of Divine love. He saw the glory that His death on the cross would give to His Heavenly Father, and the innumerable and precious benefits that it would shower upon all His creatures. For these same reasons you also may conceive a love of the cross, thereby performing an act of religion

pleasing to our Lord, and meritorious in the sight of God; but conceive this love especially for our Lord's sake that you may enter into closer union with Him. Look upon Him on the cross as the lover of your souls, and the Lamb of God offering Himself as a victim for your salvation. By His death He purposes to expiate your sins, to save you from hell and everlasting death, and to win for you a place for all eternity in the heavenly kingdom. See, then, what He has suffered for your sake. His sacred Body is covered with wounds, nails pierce His hands and feet, His face and limbs are all bruised, on His head is a crown of sharp thorns, and the precious Blood trickles down from every part. Count every minute of the three hours' agony: note the thirst, the suffering, the exhaustion, and the desolation. What a mysterious lengthening out of the suffering! Yet He might have died within the first five minutes. Do you not see how Jesus loved the cross, and how He loved you? What a wide field for meditation we find on Calvary! Find room for it in your own reflections; it will teach you why the Saints loved the cross. 'O all ye that pass by the way, attend, and see if there be any sorrow like to My sorrow' (Lam. i. 12). The sight has won many hearts, wrought many conversions, and made many Saints. What graces will it not bring to you; what good will it not operate in you! It will draw you closer to your loving Saviour; it will inspire you with courage; it will take away the bitterness of your trials, if it does not also make you embrace them willingly for our Lord's sake. St. Bernard

says: 'Will not everything be easy to you, when you shall have collected together for yourself all the bitter sufferings of your Lord?'* Should you not reckon it a part of a Christian's vocation to suffer? St. Paul wrote to the Philippians: 'Unto you it is given for Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for Him' (i. 29). This suffering, according to St. Augustine, should be life-long: 'A Christian,' he says, 'should hang on the cross through his whole life; for the time for drawing out the nails is not in this life' (Aug. Serm. 32 de Div.). We should look to the Saints to find examples of this love of the cross. How vehement it was in St. Paul! When Agabus foretold to him while he was at Cæsarea that he would be bound in Jerusalem, and the faithful weeping pressed him not to depart, St. Paul replied: 'I am ready not only to be bound, but to die also in Jerusalem, for the name of the Lord Jesus' (Acts xxi. 13). To the Galatians he wrote: 'God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ; by Whom the world is crucified to me, and I to the world' (Gal. vi. 14). To the Corinthians he wrote: 'I exceedingly abound with joy in all our tribulation' (2 Cor. vii. 4). Many of the early Christians and the martyrs were filled with a like spirit; and Saints have existed in every age of the Church who pined after sufferings for the love of Christ crucified. St. Gertrude was never more grieved, it is said, than when she had nothing

* 'Quid non tibi suave, cum tibi collegeris omnes amaritudines Domini tui?'—St. Ber., *De Quadrup. Debit.*

to suffer. St. Teresa's saying: 'To suffer or to die; if I may not suffer, then let me die,' is well known to you. Blessed Henry Suso was taught these three lessons by our Lord: Receive afflictions willingly; bear crosses patiently; learn to suffer like Jesus Christ. This is the height of perfection in this matter that we have now under consideration—namely, to love the cross. Will you not at least desire to have this love? By such desire you would give proof of a strong and tender devotion to our Lord in the mysteries of His sufferings: He has left you 'an example that you should follow His steps.'

And now, in conclusion, reproach yourselves with whatever faults you may have committed in not conforming your will with the Divine will, in giving way to impatience, and in shirking little crosses. Compare your pains, anxieties, and troubles, arising from bodily or mental sufferings, from unkind words, from intentional or unintentional annoyances, or from neglect or thoughtlessness, with the bitter, cruel sufferings, insults, and ignominy heaped upon your Divine Saviour. Finally, make your good resolutions in all sincerity to embrace for the future with patient conformity, if not with joy, every trial that it may please God to send you; and to comply as far as you are able with the penitential works imposed upon you by the Church and by your holy rule. The way of patient suffering is the way of great sanctity, rich merit, and magnificent reward. This is the teaching of St. Peter, where he says: 'You shall greatly rejoice, if now you must be for

a little time made sorrowful in divers temptations; that the trial of your faith (much more precious than gold which is tried by the fire) may be found unto praise and glory and honour at the appearing of Jesus Christ' (1 St. Pet. i. 6, 7).

XV.

HOLY COMMUNION.

'Eat, O friends, and drink, and be inebriated, My dearly beloved.'—CANT. v. 1.

IF you have recognized, in the weekly reception of the sacrament of Penance, a great help to your sanctification and fervour, what shall be said of the fruits to your soul that must result from the frequent devout reception of the Holy Eucharist? The heavenly banquet is prepared for you, when the Divine Victim is mystically but truly sacrificed upon the Altar; and then, when you approach the sacred Table, you, each in your turn, receive that same Divine Victim for the food of your soul: in that reception you partake verily and indeed of the Body and Blood of Christ. Reflect often on our Lord's words; how clearly they teach the doctrine of the real presence! 'For My Flesh is meat indeed; and My Blood is drink indeed. He that eateth My Flesh, and drinketh My Blood, abideth in Me, and I in him. As the living Father hath sent Me, and I live by the Father; so he that eateth Me, the same also shall live by Me' (St. John vi.). In receiving this holy sacrament you quit the desert for the time being, and you enter the banquet-hall of your Divine

Saviour; and it is rightly called Communion, for Christ your Lord enters into your heart.

We but faintly realize all the love of our Lord for us in coming into the world if we pass by what He has done for man in instituting the Holy Eucharist. His love was not satisfied with only assuming our nature, nor yet with uniting Himself to our souls spiritually by His grace: no, He would also, while renewing and continuing the sacrifice of Himself to His Heavenly Father, renew and continue also the act of His Last Supper. Inviting therefore the faithful to sit at His Table, and saying: 'Take ye, and eat, for this is My Body,' He, through the divinely ordained ministry of His priests, gives Himself sacramentally to both priests and people, to be their food. Other sacred texts convey a similar invitation: 'Come, eat My bread, and drink the wine which I have mingled for you' (Prov. ix. 5); 'Eat, O friends, and drink, and be inebriated, My dearly beloved' (Cant. v. 1); 'Come to Me, all you that labour and are burdened, and I will refresh you' (St. Matt. xi. 28). Our Lord's desire is to be Himself, in this most wonderful manner, our refection and our refreshment. How can we possibly conceive the astonishing grandeur of this sacrament, and the full extent of the Divine condescension? Then in Ecclesiasticus (xxiv. 29) it is written: 'They that eat Me, shall yet hunger: and they that drink Me, shall yet thirst.' These words express the holy avidity with which the faithful return again and again to Holy Communion.

It is important as well as consoling to remark that

the invitation to this sacramental banquet is pressing; it may not be declined. Let all accept it; let no vain excuses be made: 'Take ye, and eat. . . . Drink ye all of this' (St. Matt. xxvi. 26, 27); 'Compel them to come in that My house may be filled' (St. Luke xiv. 23). Let all, therefore, press forward to find a seat at the banquet; let all come hungry and eager; but let all put on the wedding-garment of grace. 'Let a man prove himself: and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of the chalice' (1 Cor. xi. 28).

In what terms can we adequately express our sense of the real magnificence of this sacrament of the Body and Blood of our Lord? The Council of Trent calls it the Bread of Angels, the Venerable and Divine Sacrament, a symbol of unity and charity, the spiritual food of souls, an antidote against sin, a pledge of future glory. Our Lord in speaking to St. Gertrude called it the most precious gage of His love. The words of one of the prophets are applied to this great sacrament: 'What is the good thing of Him, and what is His beautiful thing, but the corn of the elect, and wine springing forth virgins?' (Zach. ix. 17). 'I speak as to wise men,' said St. Paul, 'judge ye yourselves what I say. The chalice of benediction, which we bless, is it not the communion of the Blood of Christ? And the bread which we break, is it not the partaking of the Body of the Lord?' (1 Cor. x. 15, 16). Many beautiful thoughts might be drawn from a comparison of the prefigurements with the reality; but, as we are considering the special subject of Holy Communion,

and cannot therefore embrace too wide a field, let it suffice to refer to what our Lord said about one of the prefigurements. 'Your fathers,' He said to the Jews, 'did eat manna in the desert and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven: that if any man eat of it, he may not die.' These words tell us that this Divine sacrament is the true bread of life, the food of immortality, even our Lord Himself come down from heaven. Let your faith be strong in the greatness, dignity, and value of this sacrament, and in the absolute truth of our Lord's real presence therein. The veils are humble, the ceremonies are simple, the surroundings are poor; our senses cannot detect as much as was observable at Bethlehem, at Nazareth, or on Calvary; our Lord conceals both His Divinity and His Sacred Humanity, and His very life and being. Your lively faith must discern them; and with St. John you should exclaim: 'It is the Lord' (St. John xxi. 7). It is the Lord; yes, you know of very truth that in every Communion it is the Divine Majesty that abases itself; the only-begotten Son of God coming, not only to visit you, but also to unite Himself to you, and become your food. Should we not all stand in awe and wonderment when we realize what this august mystery contains, signifies, and effects?

But although in every Holy Communion you verily partake of the flesh of the Lamb of God, and receive the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, the Holy One of God, your Emmanuel, you yet must not withdraw and abstain from this sacred banquet through fear, nor even, speaking generally, through

a sense of reverence. Your sense of reverence will lead you to give proper care to make becoming preparation. God will receive more worship from your reception of the sacrament than from your abstention, provided that you are in the dispositions necessary for a worthy reception of it.

The Holy Council of Trent desired all to receive this sacrament frequently, if not every day. This statement is borne out by the words of the Council. In one place it said: 'This holy Synod, with true fatherly affection, admonishes, exhorts, begs, and beseeches, through the bowels of the mercy of our God, that all and each of those who bear the Christian name would now at length agree and be of one mind in this sign of unity, and this bond of charity, in this symbol of concord; and that, mindful of the so great majesty, and the so exceeding love of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who gave His own beloved soul as the price of our salvation, and gave His own flesh to eat, they would believe and venerate these sacred mysteries of His Body and Blood with such constancy and firmness of faith, with such devotion of soul, with such piety and worship, as to be able frequently to receive that supersubstantial bread, and that it may be to them truly the life of the soul, and the perpetual health of the mind' (Sess. 13, ch. 8). In another place the holy Council declares that it 'would fain indeed that, at each Mass, the faithful who are present should communicate, not only in spiritual desire, but also by the sacramental participation of the Eucharist' (Sess. 22, ch. 6).

As to the frequency with which you should receive Holy Communion, you should (Can. 863) avail yourselves of the opportunity of receiving daily, but at the very least you should obey the injunctions of your rule and the custom that prevails in your holy Institute. Do not be guided by any lax observance which you may have witnessed; and do not permit sloth or indifference to lead you to infidelity in receiving Communion frequently. It is not by any means a matter of small importance; a great deal depends upon it as to your spiritual advancement and fervour. Let a sickness or an indisposition be a serious one to deprive you of Holy Mass and of Communion; but, at the same time, resign yourselves to the injunctions of your superiors. When confined to your cell for any length of time by sickness, do not fail to express the desire of being permitted to receive Holy Communion as often as may be convenient. At such a time you need the strength and consolation that it affords.

You should give serious attention to your preparation for the reception of so august a sacrament. Your preparation should not be confined to what is termed the 'immediate' preparation; the 'remote 'preparation, which is of the greatest importance, should be the pious and edifying character of your lives — an interior and exterior religiousness of life. This is the truest and best preparation.

When David addressed the assembled chief men of Israel and the officers of the army, and told them

of the temple which his son should build, he created a profoundly religious impression upon them by saying: 'The work is great; for a house is prepared not for a man, but for God' (1 Par. xxix. 1). Your life should give evidence that you are impressed by the great act which you perform so often: you, too, have to prepare a house for God; so let your hearts be got ready with all possible reverence and piety for the Divine Guest, who enters them each time that you receive Holy Communion. What recollection, what faithful observance, what dutifulness, what devotion, what careful avoidance of sin and every danger of sin, should mark your daily life! When Solomon at length, having built the temple, dedicated it with a most solemn rite, he addressed himself to God in his prayer of dedication, saying: 'Is it then to be thought that God should indeed dwell upon earth? for if heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain Thee, how much less this house which I have built?' (3 Kings viii. 27). So you, too, after all your preparation, will yet deem yourselves unworthy of the Divine Guest of the Eucharist. If, however, you make becoming effort, our Lord will be pleased to accept it. The Holy Council of Trent (Sess. 13, ch. 7) says: 'If it is unbeseeming for anyone to approach to any of the sacred functions unless he approach holily, assuredly the more the holiness and divinity of this heavenly sacrament are understood by a Christian, the more diligently ought he to give heed that he approach not to receive it but with great reverence and holiness.' By these words we learn that at least

some effort should be made to prepare becomingly for Holy Communion.

While impressing yourselves, therefore, with a high idea of the reverence and the effort towards holiness which this great sacrament demands in those who are frequent communicants, reflect for a moment upon St. Paul's words, already quoted: 'Let a man prove himself.' Imperfect religious are, alas! to be met with who do not make a sufficiently careful preparation. There have indeed been cases in which religious, strangers to self-denial, have fallen into what may be termed sensual habits of one kind or another. Perhaps, if they have corrected sensuality in one form, they have contracted it in another; at one time by faults of the appetite, at other times by indulging the body in sloth, or by excessive fastidiousness in seeking bodily comforts. St. Paul says: 'Be zealous for the better gifts' (1 Cor. xii. 31); but in them such faulty ways, besides often involving the neglect of spiritual duties, and possibly the commission of various venial sins, lessened their spiritual sense and relish for the higher things. Their faultiness gradually became as a heavy weight upon the soul, dragging it down, preventing its dutiful correspondence with many graces, and depriving it of countless merits.

As time went on, matters, far from improving, became painfully worse, for their faultiness became chronic. As experience teaches, sensuality keeps a strong hold on nature, and even enlarges and multiplies its demands. Those religious went as usual to the sacred Table, but in all the misery of

their uncorrected ways, as though they did not rightly 'discern the Body of the Lord' (1 Cor. xi. 29); and even repeating on the very day of their Communion the same acts of self-indulgence and slavery to the body or appetite that are so unbecoming in religious, and so destructive of fervour and spirituality. And this went on, as though there was not, all the while, a Recording Angel noting the abuse or neglect of the Master's lent talents of mind and body, and gifts of time and grace, and a just God awaiting to deal out the full measure of the punishment due to such faultiness—only temporal, perhaps, but yet a Divine punishment, in this world or in the next.

Other religious there have been who were guilty of other classes of faults, such as pride, disregard of authority, intriguing, and uncharitableness, involving their souls in the guilt of many venial sins; and who, without any serious attempt at amendment, went also as usual to the holy Table. It scarcely needs to be pointed out that a lukewarm religious cannot make more than a lukewarm communion; and that lukewarmness is an unbecoming disposition for receiving this Divine sacrament. 'Let a man prove himself: and so let him eat of that Bread' (1 Cor. xi. 28).

See, then, if there are any faults which the eye of your Lord detects in you, and demands that you should correct. Are you perhaps conscious of them, but are you yet wanting in determination to correct them? Are you, as it were, wedded to them? Do not refuse to make the effort that may be

required in order to free yourselves from them. Do not fail to use the pruning-knife without mercy in such a case, so that, all noxious offshoots being removed, the plant may be healthy and fruit-bearing. How can religious pretend that they enter into the proper spirit of preparation for Holy Communion if they persistently repeat faults of which they have promised amendment; if their bearing is worldly or dissipated; if they spend their time in a manner unbecoming in religious; if they wilfully cause disorder, or foster misunderstandings; if, without reasonable excuse, they neglect the exercises that sanctify and render meritorious the religious life which they have embraced; or if they persistently give disedification in other ways ?

You happily have special opportunities of making a pious preparation for receiving Holy Communion; you come before the Blessed Sacrament from time to time, and you have your religious exercises; you have your hours of silence and recollection, and your meditation. Besides these important helps to your devout preparation, you no doubt form the intention of offering up the performance of your various duties for the same end; and thus everything you do is directed towards a fervent reception of this great sacrament. Oh, if you only turned all your opportunities to good account ! But if, unhappily, you were to waste or neglect them, and approach with but little reverence, recollection, or piety, would you not seem to offer some kind of indignity to our Divine Lord, seeing that your preparation could so easily be better, and is not ?

St. Bonaventure (Tract. de præpar. ad Miss., c. v.) instructs all who approach the holy Table to examine themselves and see with how much charity and with what kind of fervour they do so. He warns them against venial sins, because such sins would cause them to be tepid and otherwise indisposed; and he goes on to say that they would receive the sacrament in an unbecoming manner if they did not approach it reverently, circumspectly, and with due regard. St. Thomas of Villanova (Conc. 2, De Sacramento Altaris) warns the recipients against all irreverence. He recalls the punishments which befell those who only touched, or looked too curiously upon, the Ark, and asks what those may expect who contemn our Lord's majesty, seeing that those men were punished with so bitter a death. His words remind us that, with regard to this august sacrament, our disrespect is not to the figure or emblem, but to the very majesty of Christ Himself. But you scarcely need such warnings; they are meant rather for those who commit the heinous crime of sacrilege. How terrible are the punishments which those wicked men bring upon themselves, both in this world and in the next, who profane this magnificent sacrament and treat sacrilegiously the Body and Blood of Christ (1 Cor. xi. 29).

On the other hand, what inestimable blessings they will receive who communicate devoutly! It should console you to consider what these blessings are. The rich and abundant graces that you need in the religious life to enable you to live up to the

perfection of your calling come especially from the deep pure fountain of the Holy Eucharist. An increase of sanctifying grace, of fervour and charity, of strength and energy, of zeal for God, of detachment from worldly objects, of piety and patience, of peace and consolation—these are some of the fruits of frequent devout Communion. I say 'devout' Communion, because grace results not only as a direct consequence of a worthy reception of the sacrament, and in virtue of the efficacy of the sacrament in itself ('ex opere operato'), but also according to the measure and earnestness of the dispositions of the recipient ('ex opere operantis'). Make therefore a fervent preparation, open wide your heart, and turn your opportunities to good account, so that you may derive the abundant fruit of sanctification, spiritual vigour, and consolation which your frequent reception of Holy Communion should yield you, and that you may draw water with joy out of the Saviour's fountains (Isa. xii. 3). Your religious soul needs rich food, wholesome refection; God in His love has prepared the richest and best of nourishment in this sacrament. It rests with you to partake of it with desire and a holy zest, that your soul may be satiated. Herein is the new Passover; here you receive the Divine food which nourished the apostles, which strengthened the martyrs, and which has fed the confessors and holy virgins of every age of the Church. Join yourselves in spirit with them in this sacred bond of union that unites you to Christ Himself, and in Him to all who form His mystical

body, the Saints of all ages. You wish your eyes to be opened, 'Lord, that I may see!'; you desire to possess a truer and clearer sense of all that our Lord is to you, and of what He demands of you, so that holy affections towards Him may be excited in your heart: 'Come ye to Him,' says holy David, 'and be enlightened' (Ps. xxxiii. 6). Then, notwithstanding the holy character of your vocation, you yet have your spiritual maladies; you must go to the Divine Physician of your souls, that you may be healed of them. Moreover, in the school of religious perfection, you desire to be made conformable to the likeness of your Master—a likeness that shall be perfected in the life to come (1 St. John iii. 2; Rom. viii. 29); if you be nourished by Him you will become like Him, living in Him and by Him; so that you may be able to say with St. Paul: 'I live, now not I; but Christ liveth in me' (Gal. ii. 20). You desire never to lose this spiritual life; frequent Communion will give it and preserve it; for our Lord said: 'He that eateth Me, the same also shall live by Me' (St. John vi. 58). Finally, you wish for a pledge of everlasting life, so that death itself may not terrify you; again our Lord said: 'He that eateth this Bread shall live for ever' (St. John vi. 59).

Moved by such considerations as these, you should approach this Divine banquet with a holy hunger. Thereat you are both guest and host. The great King invites you to His Table as a guest to partake of food containing in itself all sweetness: 'Omne delectamentum in se habentem' (Wisd. xvi. 20).

You are the host in as much as our Lord enters your heart, and you entertain Him in Holy Communion as your Guest. Conceive, if you can, anything more honourable to you. The psalmist says: 'Thy friends, O God, are made exceedingly honourable' (Ps. cxxxviii. 17).

How invigorating and sanctifying is this sacramental food! At this heavenly banquet you are refreshed and strengthened. Not in vain do you partake of it; for by it you are rendered formidable to your spiritual enemies, and strong to run the way. With holy David you may exclaim: 'The Lord is my rock, and my strength, and my Saviour' (2 Kings xxii. 2). But take away this food of the spiritual life, this sap of the tree, and what will happen? Spiritual life and energy will fail; your soul will languish; the tree will be impoverished and wither. On the other hand, receive this holy sacrament with frequency and piety, and vigour will be maintained and will increase; the tree will thrive and grow.

At this Divine banquet, not only is the soul refreshed, but it is also consoled; it experiences sweetness. It is your Divine Lord Who in person visits you, to impart His consolations, and to give you a foretaste of the joys of the paradise to come. If you really taste the sweetness of this heavenly food, and the peace and joy of heavenly consolations, will you go after worldly comforts and pleasures? Will you still prize them? Ah, no; you will be favoured in some measure with the desires and relish felt by the Saints. What is

earthly, unreal, and passing will lose its attraction for you, it will become insipid; and, in your inmost soul, you will turn with the instincts of Divine faith and charity to the union with Christ your Lord, which begins in the sacramental Communion, which is not broken off, but is consummated in inconceivable magnificence and happiness at the everlasting banquet. There, in the life you are hastening to, our Lord will drink of this fruit of the vine with all His elect new in the kingdom of His Father (St. Matt. xxvi. 29).

Although such great things are prepared for you, you must yet acknowledge, with all humility and truth, that you are feeble and poor. What power lies in your prayers unless God opens to you the treasury of Christ's merits and the fountains of His Divine mercy and compassion? You must cast yourselves at our Lord's feet, and beg that He will Himself prepare your soul for this magnificent sacrament. St. Thomas of Villanova addressed Him, saying: 'O Lord, only give what Thou commandest, and then command what Thou willest. Joseph did not find gold in the sack of Benjamin his brother except that which he himself had placed there; neither wilt Thou, O good Jesus, find anything good in our breast except what Thou Thyself dost bestow' (Conc. 3, De Sac. Alt.). From our Lord, then, must you beg the bestowal of the graces that you need to prepare your heart for a worthy and profitable reception of the Holy Eucharist. But let nothing be wanting in your own endeavour; for sometimes, alas! familiarity begets a spirit of

thoughtless routine and unreal piety. Then, let your thanksgiving be in keeping with your fervent preparation, and this holy sacrament will be to you the bread of the strong, the heavenly manna of your sojourn, the channel of grace, the tree of life, the fountain of Divine consolation, the banquet of love, the pledge of salvation, and the golden ladder by which you shall mount to heaven. God grant that it may be all this to every religious! 'Eat, O friends, and drink, and be inebriated, My dearly beloved.'

XVI.

DEVOTION TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN.

'Blessed art thou among women.'—St. Luke i. 28.

The two devotions that particularly help and console religious are devotion to the Blessed Sacrament and devotion to the Blessed Virgin. They give a tone, not only to the individual piety of the members of a community, but also to the very house in which they reside. Religious are the servants of the Divine Lord Who dwells in the Tabernacle, and Who feeds them so often with the heavenly bread of the Holy Eucharist; and they are also the children of Mary, whose statues and pictures adorn their oratory and their dwelling, keeping them ever in mind of their heavenly Queen and Mother. In the retreat you should remind yourselves of the devotion you owe to the Blessed Virgin, and of what your relations with her should be.

'Blessed art thou among women': so said the Angel Gabriel when saluting Mary, before the mystery of the Incarnation had been accomplished. A thousand times more blessed, now that Mary is the veritable Mother of God made man, and the crowned Queen of Angels and men. Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Ghost, cried out the same: 'Blessed art thou among women.' And Mary in

her inspired Canticle declared: 'Behold from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed' (St. Luke i. 48).

With what unfeigned devotion, then, you should honour the Blessed Virgin; and with what joy it should fill you to render this honour to the Mother of your Lord. You render it to her especially for three reasons: because of her excellence, of her power, and of her love; and you know that this devotion is most pleasing to her Divine Son, and that it will be rewarded by Him.

You cannot but be filled with sentiments of admiration and delight when you consider all Mary's excellences; her excellence in God's predilection, in her dignity, in her graces and privileges, in her virtues, in her merits, and in her glory. Each of these excellences would afford matter for a special conference; let us, however, content ourselves with a brief consideration of them.

From all eternity God decreed the Incarnation of His Son; and in this decree it was appointed that He should be born into this world. This decree, then, dates from eternity, when God alone was, and when all things were determined for its most perfect accomplishment; and co-existent, therefore, with it was the vision in the Divine Mind of Mary. The Incarnation was not to be without Mary; she was to be the Mother of the Word Incarnate. Of Jesus the Eternal Father was one day to say: 'This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased' (St. Matt. iii. 17). With what predilection did He not regard from all eternity the Mother, to be

created by Him, endowed with every grace and perfection of which the highest created nature (other than that of His Son) was capable, and who was to be a worthy Mother of this incomparable Son! He, Whose eternal mind had decreed due weight, measure, and distance to the countless stars in the firmament, and fitting relations between every sphere, grade, and part of creation, had also with surpassing love and bounty appointed to Mary all the wonderful perfections which should place her far above every creature, angelic or human, in excellences named and unnamed, to fit her for her sublime dignity of Mother of God. Of her Holy Church reads from the Book of Proverbs: 'The Lord possessed me from the beginning of His ways, before He made anything from the beginning. I was set up from eternity, and of old before the earth was made' (viii. 22, 23).

If we come to consider the excellence of Mary in her dignity, the first thought that strikes us is that we shall not be able fully to understand this until we have first comprehended the dignity of her Divine Son. Our praise and admiration of the mother of a king, or statesman or soldier, would accord with the distinction attained by the son. How, then, will it be in Mary's case, seeing that her son is the very Son of God? There are many Archangels and Apostles, but only one to enjoy Mary's dignity. A Doctor of the Church points out that Mary is more sublime than any other creature, and that above her, but infinitely so, is God, and only God. She is not only the Mother of God, but

also as such the Queen of Heaven, of Angels, and of men. How little we know of her greatness!

What shall we say of her graces and privileges? God has adorned Mary with the rich, abundant, and wonderful graces that befitted her for the dignity to which He raised her. To her have been applied in a more than ordinary way the benefits of redemption; she was conceived without sin and preserved from the slightest fault; hers was a supereminent virtue; everything in her, in mind and heart and feeling, and in every faculty, was of a transcendent kind and order; and her holiness was such that no greater could be conceived or could be in any creature.

Then, no virtue was wanting in Mary, and she was perfect in every virtue. How great was her humility! 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord.' How perfect was her obedience! 'Be it done unto me according to Thy word.' How fervent were her prayer and praise! 'My soul doth magnify the Lord; and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.' How dutiful was her study of God's ways! 'Mary kept all these words, pondering them in her heart.' How tender was she in her reproaches! 'Son, why hast Thou done so to us? behold Thy father and I have sought Thee sorrowing.' How compassionate was she towards the needy! 'The Mother of Jesus said to Him, They have no wine.' How brave, constant, and patient was she under suffering! 'There stood by the cross of Jesus His Mother.' How shall we speak of Mary's unalterable meekness, gentleness, purity,

charity, and conformity in all things with the Divine Will?

Mary's merits, proceeding from her faithful correspondence with grace, began the moment of her receiving being, and continued through her beautiful but sorrowful career until her last breath. She was the daughter of grace, full of grace (St. Luke i. 28), and we style her 'Mother of Divine Grace.' What a fund of merit she acquired by her immediate consecration of her whole being and life to God, by her early piety, her obedience to Joachim and Anna, her vow of perpetual virginity, her perfect life in the temple, her devotedness to St. Joseph, her full correspondence with all God's designs in the mystery of the Incarnation, and her love and care of Jesus in Bethlehem, Egypt, and Nazareth. Fresh and rich merits were won upon the death of St. Joseph, and upon the many occasions of the long absence of Jesus during His missionary life. Her merits were magnificently increased during the scenes of the Passion, and at the Death and Burial of Jesus on Calvary. Then, finally, there were all the merits acquired during the years of patient waiting that followed the day of the Ascension, and preceded her peaceful death and assumption. These are but the outlines of the occasions of merit which we discover in the history of Mary's life; we shall learn in the world to come how full and abundant were her countless merits, which exceedingly surpassed those of all the Saints.

Lastly, we see Mary's excellence in her present glory. Her transcendent glory must be measured

not only by her countless merits and all her other excellences, including the greatness of her dignity as Mother of God, but also by that special untold glory which, we may believe, was decreed from all eternity by the Three Persons of the ever-adorable Trinity for this most perfect and most cherished creature, raised by Them in greatness far above every other creature, and the object of their condescending complacency. Were we to address Mary by all the exquisite titles by which many of the Fathers of the Church have addressed her, we should yet want words by which adequately to praise this most glorious Queen of Heaven.

All these excellences of your heavenly Mother should beget in you fervent sentiments of admiration, reverence, and love; and these sentiments should manifest themselves in expressions of praise and devotedness. Her excellences are all from God, to whom she sings in heaven her unceasing 'Magnificat'; and she wishes you to join with her in her hymn of thanksgiving and benediction. While, then, you give praise to God for all His works, extol Him also by your admiration and love of Mary, in whom are displayed so especially the wonders of the Divine dispensations.

Let us now, in the second place, consider Mary in the greatness of her power. In this we see her relation with us. She is our powerful Advocate with her Divine Son, and the Protectress of the Church.

From the earliest ages Christians who honoured the Apostles and Martyrs, honoured also the ever-

blessed Mother of our Saviour. Although it is true that for a time, while the world was being initiated into the fundamental doctrines of the Christian religion, there was no very prominent display of devotion to Mary, which was to come in its own good time, yet tradition tells us of her servants on Mount Carmel; and we may be sure that the zeal for her honour manifested at the time of the Council of Ephesus was not of sudden growth, but that it was the outcome of a loving memory of Mary, and of devotedness to her, coming down in the Church from Apostolic times. Already had her praises been written by St. Ambrose, St. Epiphanius, St. John Chrysostom, St. Jerome, and St. Augustine. At the Council itself St. Cyril of Alexandria, in fervid terms, announced Mary's greatness. Later on followed St. Peter Chrysologus, St. Fulgentius, St. Sophronius; and, a century later, Saint Bede the Venerable, St. John Damascene, and St. Tarasius; in the twelfth century, St. Anselm and St. Bernard; in the thirteenth, St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Bonaventure; in the fifteenth, St. Bernardine of Siena; and in the sixteenth, St. Thomas of Villanova. Some of these Saints are honoured as Doctors of the Church. What an array we have here of learned and holy men who have proclaimed Mary's praises, and handed down in the Church the beautiful tradition of devotion to her! They teach us to look up to Mary as our Advocate with her Divine Son.

A most striking lesson regarding Mary's relation towards us is given us by the Church. From the

earliest ages she has dedicated churches under Mary's invocation. The tradition of St. Mary of the Snow comes to us from the fourth century, from the time of Pope Liberius. The Church, too, has honoured our Lady with many Feast Days, and with divine offices to commemorate them.

The power and efficacy of Mary's intercession are especially commemorated upon the Festival of the Holy Rosary. She is looked up to and honoured as the Protectress of the Church and the Destroyer of Heresies. St. Dominic succeeded in destroying the widespread heresy of the Albigenses with the weapon of the Rosary.

The sovereign Pontiffs have again and again invited the faithful to throw themselves upon the protection of Mary; they have encouraged them to clothe themselves in her scapular, and to recite her Rosary. Why all this? In order to instil into the minds of the faithful a firm belief in the power of Mary's intercession, and a devout confidence in its benefit if exercised in their behalf. We believe that Mary is all-powerful with her Divine Son; we call to mind how our Lord wrought His first recorded miracle of changing water into wine at her request. We meditate upon the tender relations existing between the Son and the Mother, and upon Mary's exaltedness in the heavenly kingdom. We recall what we have heard of the favours bestowed through Mary upon both Saints and sinners in every age and in every land. All this forces us to recognize the grandeur of Mary in the power which God has bestowed upon her as the Advocate of men and the

Protectress of the Church, and how worthy she is of our honour and confidence on that account.

We have now, in the third place, to consider that we should honour Mary because of her love. Who are the clients of Mary who have not, at one time or another, been conscious of her goodness towards them? Has she not answered their prayers? Has she not watched over them, and preserved them by her powerful patronage and protection from many dangers? Perhaps some of you feel that you owe to Mary your vocation to the religious life. Was it not after you began to realize the beauty and benefit of devotion to the Blessed Virgin that you felt more drawn to piety and to distaste for the world, and finally to a desire to consecrate your life to God? And have you not in religion been sensible of her care of you? Do not imagine that in all this your conjectures arise from any delusion; for consider how natural it is for you to expect some tokens of Mary's love. You look for these tokens because, as you are the object of our Lord's love, it must follow that His Holy Mother also will love you; and because, being yourselves devout towards your heavenly Mother, she will in return repay you by many favours obtained by her powerful intercession.

Who so well as Mary understood or understands her Divine Son's unspeakable love for men? The mystery of Divine love will never in its full meaning and measure be comprehended by us; but we may contemplate some of its displays. God becomes man, coming in person to be man's Saviour, and to instruct and guide him in the way to eternal life.

For man He lives, suffers, and gives His life. In a Church founded by Him on earth, enriched with the treasury of His own infinite merits, He leaves holy agencies for man's sanctification and salvation; and He so raises man up by grace that St. Peter is able to say that we 'may be made partakers of the Divine nature' (2 St. Pet. i. 4). The Son of God takes a human heart with which to love man with human affection and tender human feeling. Mary, above all others, read the meaning and took the measure of all this love; and she, in the sphere of her own admirable vocation, ministered in part to the accomplishment of these mysteries of God's love of man, so that she is even styled the 'Co-redemptrix' of mankind; and the pious opinion is held by some that God, Who decreed to give to the world His Son through Mary, has also decreed that all graces merited for the world by the Son should pass through the hands of the Mother.* Be persuaded, then, that Mary loves you, if only because Jesus loves you, and because of her zeal for the realization of His designs in your regard.

Remember, too, how it was on the cross that our Divine Saviour committed us all, in the person of St. John, to the care of His Mother. To Mary He said: 'Woman, behold thy Son'; and to St. John: 'Behold thy mother' (St. John xix. 26, 27). Since our Lord has united us all to Himself in the mystical body of which He Himself is the head, and since He thus in a spiritual sense lives in us, Mary sees

* 'Nihil nos Deus habere voluit quod per Mariæ manus non transiret.'—St. Bernard.

in all of us the image of her Divine Son, and she will continue to do so while this mystical union lasts; that is, she will continue to do so unless and until we deserve to be reprobated by her Son. Does not this account for the continuance of her prayers even for sinners? They have not yet fallen under reprobation, and she will yet strive for their conversion and salvation. What confidence, then, you should feel in Mary's love of you; for you have not lost grace by mortal sin, but you are the servants of Christ her Son, consecrated to His love; and, moreover, you receive Him frequently in Holy Communion.

Consider, too, that Mary loves you because of your devotion to herself. Following the instincts of Catholic piety, you began early to look upon Mary as your heavenly Mother, and you practised devotion to her. This devotion increased with your years. You loved to recite the 'Hail Mary' and the Litany of the Blessed Virgin; you were invested in her scapular; you said the Rosary; you kept her festivals with devotion, and you knelt before her altar or her statue to invoke her intercession. Then, when you entered religion, you did all this and more, to testify to your love of Mary. If your piety has been genuine, can you believe that Mary has been indifferent to these manifestations of your devotion? Instances are on record of Mary's having obtained the grace of conversion and salvation for sinners who had been faithful to some slight practice of devotion to her; what then may you not hope for, seeing that your practices of devotion have been so special and so constant? Not a single 'Hail Mary'

or pious ejaculation is unnoticed; not a Rosary or Litany, or Meditation, or Visit is left unrecorded. Be comforted by the thought that by your pious practices in Mary's honour you have been laying by and storing up for yourselves benedictions, which she will shower upon you as you need them, or as they will be beneficial to you, and that in this way she will manifest her love of you. Blest are you in your devotion to Mary, and blest are all who love Mary. Holy Church does not hesitate to apply to the client of Mary the words of the Book of Proverbs: 'Blessed is the man . . . that watcheth daily at my gates' (viii. 34). Be assured, then, that Mary loves you, both because her Divine Son loves you, and because you are devout to her.

Let it then be to you both a duty and a joy to honour the ever-blessed and Immaculate Mother of God. In your praises of her join with fervour with the faithful of every age: 'Behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed' (St. Luke i. 48). She merits your praise, your reverence, your confidence, and your love, because of her exaltedness and excellence, because of her power, and because of her love. Alas for any Christians who dishonour or neglect to honour Mary! God has raised her above all Angels and Saints to a greatness and a glory that are unique. She is therefore entitled, whether we recognize the fact or not, to all the honour, respect, and devotion that may be paid to a creature. What will be the feelings of heretics and bad Catholics, and of all who disregard devotion to the Blessed Virgin, when they shall, in the next world, see what

honour God required to be paid to her whom He raised up to be the Mother of His Son?

Be zealous in availing yourselves of every help to your sanctification and salvation. The intercession of the Blessed Virgin and her powerful patronage should be reckoned as such a help. How many are the occasions on which you feel the need of help and comfort; upon these occasions have recourse to Mary. But that you may more fully merit her regard, let your devotion to her be constant. What a blessing and consolation this devotion will prove to you! St. Anselm assures us that all who turn to Mary and to whom she pays attention, will most certainly be saved.* You will place yourselves under her care when approaching the sacraments; you will implore her help whenever temptation arises; you will cast yourselves in spirit at her feet in your difficulties, troubles, and sorrows; you will honour her as your heavenly Mother, Queen, Lady, Mediatrix, and Advocate. If such will be your practice, you may be confident of Mary's love, care, and protection, which will be a sweet comfort to you while you are tossed about on the stormy sea of life, but especially as you prepare to enter the harbour of eternal repose.

* 'Sicut omnis, O Beatissima, a te aversus et a te despectus, necesse est ut intereat; ita omnis ad te conversus et a te respectus, impossibile est ut pereat.'—St. Anselm.

SIXTH DAY.

XVII.

THE WAY OF THE SAINTS.

'You are fellow-citizens with the Saints.'—EPH. ii. 19.

AMONG the many tracks in life that those who have gone before us have left, we should carefully seek the one that we may call the 'way of the Saints.' The 'just made perfect' have trodden before us the path of the evangelical counsels; they edified the Church during the few years of their exile on earth, and they passed to their reward. We have, it is true, the lessons of our Lord's doctrine, and the lustre of His example, and these we frequently study in our meditations; but we may also derive benefit from contemplating the lives of the Saints, the friends of the Bridegroom who stood and heard Him, and rejoiced with joy because of the Bridegroom's voice (St. John iii. 29); that they may be our guides in putting our Divine Master's lessons into practice. We do not pretend to the exalted grace that God bestowed upon His special friends and servants, and we know that we do not possess the sublime gifts and supernatural favours which were vouchsafed to them. We do not put our-

selves on a level with them; rather, we venerate them, and offer them the honour due to God's Saints; but we cannot forget that they were clothed with the same humanity as ours, and that they passed their lives in spheres of labour and trial such as those in which we, by God's dispensation, have been placed. So St. Paul tells us: 'You are fellow-citizens with the Saints.' Be comforted with the assurance that God calls you to the way of life that will lead you to the same kingdom of glory that the Saints have reached, in which it will be your happy lot to join with them in singing for ever the praises of God. How good God is to have created you for so sublime a vocation! Do not permit yourselves to be led aside from it by the wiles and temptations of the Evil One, by the delusive attractions and false pleasures of the world, or by any vicious inclination of fallen nature. God calls you to the way that leads to eternal life, concerning which way our Lord said: 'How narrow is the gate, and strait is the way that leadeth to life: and few there are that find it' (St. Matt. vii. 14).

We are not about to study the life of any particular Saint, nor yet the lessons drawn from the lives of several Saints; but we will study the characteristics of the Saints generally—the chief points or features that are observable in the lives of the Saints. If these considerations assist you in discovering where your own efforts fail, they should not be without profit.

Just as the young look up to their elders, and novices to their teachers, so may all of us look up

to the Saints to see in what they excelled, and in what spirit they served God. If we look in any other direction, we are in danger of being misdirected by what is disedifying, or of being drawn down to a lower level of conduct; but if we take the Saints for our guides, they will lead us to a more perfect life. In the way of such a life we should direct our steps.

Happily you are anxious to correct what is faulty, and desirous of shaping your conduct by a more perfect gauge and standard. What you are sensible of, is that you are far from the perfection of the Saints, but you would gladly strive after a nearer approach to their sanctity. Such a disposition is the result of the working of Divine grace in you, and you must foster it with humility but with constancy, and God will aid you to advance in perfection.

Let our first reflection be that there are two ways to heaven—namely, the path of innocence and the path of true repentance; one is just as sure a way as the other, because, as a matter of fact, God has revealed to us that we may reach heaven by either one or the other. Some Saints have reached heaven by the way of innocence, and others by the way of penance or true repentance. St. Peter, St. Mary Magdalen, St. Augustine, St. Mary of Egypt, St. Margaret of Cortona, St. Camillus of Lellis, and others are illustrious examples of true repentance. These Saints reached the heavenly reward, not by the way of innocence, but by that of penance. There are other Saints who had, at one time of their lives, been more or less indifferent in the service of God; as, for example, St. Anselm and St. John of

God; and we remember how St. Teresa reproached herself with loving the world too much. Be not disheartened, then, if your conscience has in the past been burdened with serious infidelities, and even by mortal sin; provided that you have repented of your sins. While lamenting, as you may continue to do, any past sinfulness, indifference in God's service, or ingratitude, do not permit your mind to be weighed down by discouragement; but excite yourselves to great faith in God's infinite mercy, and to unbounded confidence in His goodness. Some who have sinned more grievously than you have been led by grace to great holiness.

The first characteristic that we will note in the Saints is their horror of sin and all that tends to draw men into sin. This feeling, the result of grace, seemed as an instinct in those among them who ever preserved their baptismal innocence; and in those who were saved by the way of penance, it was engendered at the moment of their repentance. Because they were happily influenced by a supernatural horror of sin, you must not therefore conclude that they were freed from temptations and from the molestations of the arch-enemy of man. This would be an unreal view of the lives of the Saints. How many of them owe their crowns to the victories gained over their temptations! Call to mind the trials of St. Catharine of Siena, of which I spoke in the conference on holy chastity; how her mind and imagination were attacked by evil thoughts and frightful pictures. Our Lord assured her that these troubles were a source of merit to her, since

she abhorred them and rejected them. St. Anthony and others were subjected to very violent assaults. So let us be assured that the Saints, like ourselves, were not without their temptations. Let us, however, be equally assured that they would not have advanced, as excuses for yielding to them, the strength of the temptations or the frailty of nature; and that they were deeply impressed with a dread and horror of offending God, and that they shrank and recoiled from every voluntary moral fault. Do not, however, suppose that the Saints were without certain faults of character, and defective mannerism, or that they were never guilty of errors of judgment, and never held mistaken views; they would have been more than human if they had been entirely free from such failings and errors. But remember that these failings and errors might exist without any moral fault. Sometimes it is said that certain Saints are rather to be admired than imitated; of others it is remarked that it must have been trying to live with them. Just so; but what we have to do is to imitate their supernatural dread of sin—that is, of moral guilt. In this matter be genuine, firm, and unyielding. Do not through fickleness, or by courting danger, imitate the moth that flits around the candle until at last it gets burned and falls. When there is question of sin, do not in condescension to others, or by making any compromise with your own unwarranted desires, step upon the inclined plane: it is the fatal slope that leads to the precipice. Then is the time when your love of God, of virtue, or of duty is put to the test. Turn at once to God in

fervent supplication, and continue to pray until the full light of grace shows you the danger, and reveals all its dark possibilities—until grace by its holy aid and sweet attraction draws you safely away from the evil. This is what the Saints did, and this is the path in which you should strive to follow them.

You are not called upon to adopt towards yourselves the severe measures that they often employed, both to punish themselves for their faults, and to so far correct and subdue nature as to render themselves more like Angels on earth than men. Their severity with themselves should convince you of the absolute earnestness with which they aimed at purity of heart and innocence of life. Without a similar earnestness of purpose, though it may not be as fervent and generous as theirs, you will have many faults to atone for. Set your faces, then, earnestly against every voluntary offence against Almighty God; and by prayer, piety, and the fervent reception of the holy sacraments, seek the grace necessary to maintain yourselves in so holy a resolve.

How different was the conduct of the Saints with regard to their own faults from that which they pursued with regard to the faults of their neighbour. First of all, they were very much in earnest in discovering their own faults; while, except when required to do so by duty or charity, they did not seek to know the faults of their neighbour. Secondly, they were very severe in dealing with their own faults, while they dealt leniently with those of their neighbour. Thirdly, they never sought excuse, or sheltered themselves under an excuse, when it was

a case of their own fault; while their charity led them to seek every excuse for their neighbour when detected in any fault. And lastly, while the sight of their own fault filled them with indignation against themselves, and a sense of their misery, weakness, and guilt, the sight of their neighbour's fault filled them with compassion and a desire to do him good. Study in all this the signs of true holiness, and strive to profit by the lessons contained in such conduct on the part of the Saints. The exercise of charity is called for by our Lord, in our relations not only with such as edify, but also with those who have the misfortune to disedify. Let us excuse, if we can; let us be slow to condemn; let us be even slower to speak of the fault; but let us be always ready to pray for the one who offends, and to humble ourselves with the thought that we ourselves may even yet do worse, being mindful of St. Paul's warning: 'He that thinketh himself to stand, let him take heed lest he fall' (1 Cor. x. 12). Let us also fear to usurp judgment; for St. Paul again warns us, saying: 'Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? To his own lord he standeth or falleth' (Rom. xiv. 4). And our Lord Himself has said: 'Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned' (St. Luke vi. 37).

But let us now pass on to consider another characteristic of the Saints—their thoroughness, their whole-heartedness in pursuing their vocation. It is not enough for the servant not to offend his master, he must also render efficient and dutiful service. The Saints were not only fearful of offend-

ing God by sin; they were also devotedly given to His service. Witness St. Paul, St. Patrick, St. Gregory the Great, St. Dominic, St. Francis, St. Charles, St. Teresa, St. Catharine of Siena, and St. Bernard. Read especially the lives of Holy Founders of Religious Orders, and of canonized religious, who offered themselves as holocausts upon the altar of religion. They did not enter religion only to enjoy the blessings of seclusion from the tumult, anxieties, and annoyances of the world, and the satisfaction resulting from the society of the virtuous; they had something more in view. They embraced the holy state of religion under God's call with the intention of devoting themselves wholly to His service. They, of course, knew that their vocation was to a more perfect life; but it did not enter into their mind that it was to be a life of ease and perfect peace, for they meant it to be one of self-sacrifice. Having put their hands to the plough, they did not look back (St Luke ix. 62); and retracting nothing from their offering, they persevered steadily in the path of their vocation, and were found worthy of the Kingdom of God.

You would do well to see what place 'self' has in your service. You know that you cannot at the one time serve both God and Mammon; be persuaded, too, that you cannot in your beautiful vocation serve both God and self. If self has a strong hold upon your affections, if it occupies your thoughts, and is the chief object of your attentions, there must necessarily be some holding back of devotedness in the pursuit of your vocation, and

some failure in complying with the perfect spirit of your holy rule. The end of your holy Institute, the requirements of your rule, have not the service of 'self' in view, but the immolation of self at the shrine of religion. This is the noble sacrifice that the Saints made; and then, realizing that they no longer belonged to themselves, but wholly to God, they looked to their holy rule and to their superiors for their future guidance, and they entered with all their heart into the accomplishment of the duties of their state.

How different, alas! from this thoroughness, this whole-heartedness, this self-sacrifice, is the spirit of religious whose minds are fixedly centred in themselves, and who are ever consulting their own comfort, convenience, pleasure, and ease! It is painful to meet at times with religious of this kind: their thought for their neighbour, and their devotedness to their charge, come second to the absorbing consideration of themselves. What pain, therefore, this great imperfection of theirs gives to those around them; and especially to their superiors, who regret to see what merit they lose for themselves and what gain they deprive others of. If the Saints had been deterred by fatigue, anxiety, love of repose, fear of inconvenience, undue regard for health, fastidiousness, by cold or heat, or other such considerations—how slow would have been the progress of their sanctification, and how poor the record of their achievements for the good of their neighbour! Yet there are religious with whom these considerations weigh unduly. To correct themselves, besides

exciting themselves by the edifying example of the Saints and of zealous religious, they would do well to call to mind their own first fervour, and they should study earnestly the spirit of their rule. They are not asked to advance beyond their rule, but to take their inspiration from it, and to conform themselves to it. In the third place, in keeping with this thoroughness of the Saints, was their sincerity. They were sincere in their dealings with God and with their neighbour. Their piety and charity were not superficial, but deep, interior, and genuine, and therefore equal to the test and to the strain to which they were put. Just as many words and many attestations do not constitute friendship, neither do many prayers of themselves constitute piety. In the Saints earnestness did not exist only in the time of prayer, but also in their spirit of recollection and throughout the accomplishment of their duties, all of which were performed for God's sake. In this way they were sincere with God: piety was not assumed and discarded like a garment, it was a spirit that pervaded their soul and moulded their lives.

If we examine their charity towards their neighbour, we shall see in this also a proportionate earnestness: it arose from this, that they loved their neighbour for God's sake. This made their charity supernatural, true, and disinterested. Witness St. Paul's profession to the Corinthians: 'I most gladly will spend and be spent myself for your souls' (1 Cor. xii. 15). There were in the case of the Saints no deception, envy, undermining of the

neighbour's character or position, and using of the neighbour for their own ends. St. Paul went on to say: 'Although loving you more, I be loved less.' We must not alter the genuineness of our charity, even when the means that it leads us to adopt cause us to be less appreciated than we deserve. Sincere charity will be well-ordered; it will cause us to give first consideration to our neighbour's eternal interests. It will also be enduring—'charity never falleth away' (1 Cor. xiii. 8); it will continue to manifest itself under difficulties and opposition. Such was the charity of St. Elizabeth of Hungary, St. Francis de Sales, St. Vincent de Paul, and St. Philip Neri.

We will not stay to consider other striking characteristics observable in the Saints, such as their humility, patience, ready obedience, and self-denial. Study for the present those upon which we have dwelt. Happy will you be, if, having found the path by which Saints have made their way to the heavenly reward, you feel drawn to tread it too. Through human frailty there may be some faltering in your pursuit of it, but be fully determined that there shall be no deliberate going back. In all humility, but in all confidence, ask God to draw you to it, and to preserve you upon it, by the sweet attraction and support of His grace. Happy will you be if you enter fully into God's service so as to be able to say with St. Paul: 'Our glory is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity of heart and sincerity of God, and not in carnal wisdom, but in the grace of God, we have conversed in this world' (2 Cor. i. 12).

What heavenly favours and rich merit will be yours if, walking in the way of the Saints, you love justice and hate iniquity, if you perform fully all that you piously undertook to do when you made your religious profession; if you withhold from God nothing that He deigns to demand of you; and if there is genuine earnestness in your piety and charity. Beware of seeking light and leading from the tepid and indevout, from the disaffected and unobservant; they do not themselves relish as they ought the things of God, nor do they taste true peace. Whither, therefore, can they be expected to guide those whom they counsel? There are, alas! many who tread the imperfect way, as though heedless of the strict obligation of ever tending to perfection—let it not be the way you will pursue. The Holy Ghost promises to sustain you if, happily, you value the discipline of duty and piety, and strive to follow the way of the Saints; for the royal psalmist says: 'You that love the Lord, hate evil: the Lord preserveth the souls of His Saints, He will deliver them out of the hand of the sinner' (Ps. xcvi. 10). The Sacred Heart of your Divine Lord claims at your hands a fervent and faithful service, and devotedness to religious observance and spiritual progress, in return for which It will comfort you with interior peace and many consolations.

You should wish to be confirmed in the qualities that ensure perseverance. Solid virtue and not spasmodic devotion, patient and continuous effort and not sudden enthusiasm, will guarantee the progress in perfection without which perseverance

will be precarious. You are making for a goal, let every step be a forward one; you are fighting for a glorious crown, let every blow be sure and effective. Our Lord has said: 'He that shall persevere unto the end, he shall be saved' (St. Matt. x. 22).

While striving to walk in the way of the Saints, invoke their intercession. Place yourselves especially under the powerful protection of our Blessed Lady, 'Queen of all Saints,' of St. Joseph, and of your holy patrons. Be ever on the watch for that happy consummation of the religious life which awaits devout religious. How great will be your reward when your watching shall be at an end, and the Bridegroom shall come! For it is written: 'Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His Saints' (Ps. cxv. 15). May God give you to realize ever more and more the perfection to which He now calls you, and what would be in keeping with your present dignity! For, as St. Paul reminds you: 'You are fellow-citizens with the Saints.'

XVIII.

HUMAN FRAILTY.

'I am needy and poor; O God, help me.'—Ps. lxix. 6.

As you have progressed in the course of this retreat you have discovered in yourselves various shortcomings, and you have perhaps been struck by a sense of your weakness in more than one respect. You have been convinced that you should aim at genuine interior and exterior religiousness; and under this conviction you have perhaps realized that there has been some neglect and in some degree imperfect virtue and piety. Happy you if this knowledge has led you to humble yourselves before God, and beseech Him for help and grace to enable you to become more pleasing in His sight, and worthier instruments in His hands for the accomplishment of the works confided to your holy Institute. It is not even now too late to incite yourselves to such sentiments and to address to God such a prayer.

How great is human frailty, how universal! It is met with even in the sphere of religious life; and in the aged and advanced, as well as in the young and inexperienced. The more you reflect upon it, the more thoroughly will you become convinced that holiness is not a growth of nature, but the fruit

of supernatural grace. What wonder, then, if you find in yourselves traces of human frailty! the wonder would be if there were none. But yet your life-struggle must be to remove them; while they remain, humble yourselves because of them. Your humiliation will be to you a gain in grace and merit, to compensate you for what you lose by your weaknesses and imperfections. In view of these, you may exclaim with David: 'I am needy and poor.' Let not, however, your extreme want discourage you, for God is good, compassionate, and bountiful; so say also with David: 'O God, help me.' You will not pray in vain, if you pray constantly, and with earnestness and confidence. If you keep in view only your own weakness, you will be overcome by a sense of insufficiency, misgiving, and alarm, and this will interfere with your spiritual energy and progress, and undermine your religious life: you should ever look up to God with childlike trust, and this will inspire you with courage and constancy.

It is true that human frailty impedes and undoes the work of grace; but let your mistrust of yourselves, arising from a sense of your frailty, be accompanied with great faith and confidence in the assistance, protection, and providence of God. Whether you consider the work of your personal sanctification, or the duties imposed upon you by your state and employment, what a source of consolation it should be to you, to feel that you are never alone, that you are not left to yourselves—that God is with you! We do not attempt to

conjecture in what way, and how far, God is present with religious who are unfaithful to the strict obligations of their vocation, and if, in view of His care of others, He will prevent them from doing harm or will bless any of their works; but God will certainly be ever at hand to assist His faithful servants in their labours and under their trials, and this conviction should inspire them with consolation and confidence.

You find that the work of your personal sanctification is an anxious one. It is a healthy sign if you feel this; for indifferent religious have no anxiety about it in their case. What, we may ask, makes it an anxious work? The anxiety arises from such causes as these: your spiritual weakness, your proclivity to evil, your want of resolution and religious energy, the power of your passions, the dangers by which you are beset on account of your surroundings, or, finally, the snares and temptations of the devil. You will be subject to anxiety, at one time or another, upon all these scores, as long as you are on earth; but, notwithstanding your frailty, it does not follow that you will fall and be lost. God, Who offers to all the graces necessary for salvation, never fails to vouchsafe to you the grace to avoid mortal sin, by which alone you can be lost. It is because the sinner by his own act rejects the grace that he falls, and that, therefore, he becomes personally guilty and amenable to the punishment due to his sin. This assurance of the Divine assistance should be to you a source of great consolation. You will not be overcome and fall into

mortal sin—no matter how great may be your frailty or how strong the temptation—unless you fall with deliberation and consent on your part, rejecting the grace that God proffers to sustain and save you. You should not fail, when under temptation, to seek this necessary grace by fervent prayer, and to correspond with it. Happily you are so minded and resolved, and so bound by charity to God, as to be determined never to consent to mortal sin. Therefore, confiding in God's promised aid, you may feel happy and assured; and, with mistrust, however, in yourselves, you may exclaim with David: 'In Thee, O Lord, have I hoped, let me never be confounded' (Ps. xxx. 2); and use also these other expressive words of his: 'Though I should walk in the midst of the shadow of death I will fear no evils, for Thou art with me' (Ps. xxii. 4).

Human frailty manifests itself also in the lesser faults which do not constitute an absolute revolt against God. Who, indeed, is free from venial sin? As to these lesser faults, you are not guaranteed against falling into venial sin, which is not of itself an obstacle to your salvation, although an impediment to your sanctification. God's grace is all-powerful; but human nature is weak, and your evil proclivities may be strong; consequently, you may not always avail yourselves fully of grace. You may be surprised in various faults. If you would avoid every deliberate venial sin—and this you should endeavour to do—you must walk in the way of the Saints and practise great self-denial, circum-

spection, and union with God by constant fervent prayer. You may not attain this perfection of charity. While aspiring to it, humble yourselves on account of your venial faults, and strive to avoid them as far as possible, and to atone for them day by day by sorrow joined with your prayers and good works, especially the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Endeavour at the same time—and this recommendation is of the utmost importance—to root out of your hearts all affection for them; for while you remain attached to these faults, your repentance will be unreal, and your purpose of amendment futile. But lift up your hearts and voices to God. If you are in proper dispositions, and if you try to avoid the deliberate commission of venial sin, you may be filled with confidence that He will bestow grace to enable you to do so. It is scarcely to be expected that any of us will be made free of all human frailty in this life: 'In many things,' St. James says, 'we all offend' (iii. 2). Then our grace, we know, will be 'according to the measure of the giving of Christ' (Eph. iv. 7); and on our side there are not merits but demerits. But be consoled by the thought of the great goodness of God in preserving you from many grievous sins, and of the mercy which He has always shown you; and be filled with confidence in the continued aid of His holy grace. And be not disconcerted or envious, if to others is given a larger measure of grace than that which is accorded to you, and if, therefore, they surpass you in the perfection of their lives. Bless and praise God, not only for His unspeakable good-

ness to you, but also for all the favours that He bestows upon others, and for all His works.

Human frailty is the cause of your sluggishness in the acquirement of the perfection of the holy state which you have embraced, and of the Christian and religious virtues. May it not be the case that, although you do not fall into mortal sin, and although you endeavour not to commit deliberate venial sin, you have yet to acknowledge that you are far from being advanced in virtue? Should you not on this account exclaim with David: 'I am needy and poor; O God, help me'? If only you persevere in your efforts, and turn to the best account the graces you receive, such conduct will prove an antidote against your frailty; and you may console yourselves with the assurance that God will yet enable you to attain the degree of perfection to which you are called. In the meantime, help yourselves in humility by the knowledge of your backwardness; and in peace of mind, by a firm confidence in God's goodness and in the help of His grace.

Human frailty will make itself manifest, by fickleness, infidelity, and incompleteness in the discharge of your duties, and in the course of your actions. Our Lord may have to address to you the message that He sent by St. John to the Bishop of Sardis: 'I find not thy works full before My God' (Apoc. iii. 2). Without giving way to despondency, you should only try to be more earnest, if you desire to please your Divine Master, and to partake of the 'hidden manna' (Apoc. ii. 17) of His consolations, reserved for servants who realize what duty demands,

and who have a zeal to please Him. Especially, perhaps, does human frailty manifest itself by irresolution, cowardice, and impatience under the difficulties that arise in the fulfilment of the duties of your office or employment. What if this be the case? You should weigh well, and in a religious spirit, what is required of you, and the conditions under which you discharge your duties. If, as religious, you find yourselves placed in a certain sphere of action that is attended with many cares and anxieties, and perhaps with much labour, recognize that it is God Who, through your superiors, has placed you in it. Religious actuated by faith and piety, although they may feel the weight of their charge, will not be discouraged under it; whereas self-reliant and unspiritual religious will be borne down, not only by the responsibility, but also by the difficulties of the charge and by the disappointments they meet with. One of the sources of satisfaction found in religion is that your charge and sphere of labour are appointed to you by your superiors, and are accepted by you in a spirit of obedience. Let, then, your hope and confidence be that God, for Whose sake you have undertaken the labour, and in Whose name it has been imposed upon you, will bless your efforts. The work is His, and you are only His humble instruments in its accomplishment. All that is asked of you is that you will be dutiful, and use the means that should be employed for its success.

When the people of Israel carried their murmurings to Moses, he addressed himself to God, saying:

'Why hast Thou laid the weight of all this people upon me?' (Num. xi. 11). The charge had been imposed upon Moses by God, and therefore he carried all the troubles of it to God. Though God often inflicted severe punishment upon the offending people, He yet heard the prayers of Moses, and honoured and recompensed him, not holding him accountable for the people's obstinacy and many sins. We read in Ecclesiasticus: 'Every excellent work shall be justified; and the worker thereof shall be honoured therein' (xiv. 21). How excellent are the works of your Institute: only be found faithful, and, as the labourer is worthy of his hire, you may feel confident that, grace helping you, you will yet reach the end of your toil, and that God will call you to the promised recompense. 'Work your work before the time,' says again the holy writer, 'and He will give you your reward in His time' (Ecclus. li. 38).

Such thoughts as these should encourage and console you under the misgivings that may arise in you on account of your human frailty. You belong to God, and you are working for God; you can therefore always turn to Him with trust and confidence and say to Him: 'This is Thy work, help me. I am needy and poor; O God, help me.'

There are some phases of despondency and mistrust of self which almost fill up the cup of human misery, and which, therefore, may be deemed to be allied with human frailty and to deserve consideration in connection with it.

Let us consider three classes of persons who are

troubled with feelings of despondency; and let us try to find a remedy for this spiritual malady, or suggest thoughts for their correction and comfort.

There are some persons who feel despondent by reason of the past. No acts seem to come so well from them as acts of contrition. Is it not possible that in this there is some imperfection? Are these persons unintentionally manifesting a want of confidence in God's mercy, or in the efficacy of sacramental absolution? Upon your sincere repentance you should have parted with the sense of discomfiture and pain that you felt at your fall; and the pardon of your sins should have brought you a sense of having been forgiven, of peace restored. The remembrance of your sin which should renew your regret should ever be accompanied by the remembrance of the mercy shown you; and this should give rise to a renewal of your thankfulness. God is worshipped by both these affections. But if your satisfaction in making acts of contrition, rather than other acts, arises from a continued misgiving about your having been pardoned, then, if no reasonable grounds exist for such misgiving, you should correct this imperfection which is injurious to you, by eliciting acts of faith in the goodness, mercy, and love of God. Reasonable grounds for misgiving would be your continued repetition of the sin, the absence of amendment. But while you are moved to repeat your acts of contrition, you clearly manifest your sorrow and detestation of your sin; and this ought to satisfy you that your repentance was genuine,

and that you ought to be at peace about your past sins.

Other persons are ever despondent about the present. This is a severe form of trial, under which you should know how to act. With these persons there is a sense of being unequal to the difficulties, trials, and duties of the hour; they become a cause of worry to themselves and to others. It would almost seem that such persons have lost all thought of the tender Providence that watches over us all, and that measures according to the strength or weakness of every one of us the burden which we are required to carry. It is not pretended that you have no effort to make and no labour to endure; but your spirit of faith, and your sense of confidence in God, should be such as to teach you to leave to His Divine arrangement the issue of your works, undertakings, afflictions, and trials, and to proceed in all things and at all times in a spirit of conformity with His will. Over-anxiety, despondency, and mistrust are failings which not only displease God, and impede the bestowal of his favours, but which also cause the loss of peace to yourselves, and deprive you of much merit. Your duty, then, is to renew your confidence in God, and to desire only what God wills; and this should remove the sense of despondency, and give you a hopeful and calm mind.

There is also a class of persons who take a gloomy or over-anxious view of the future. They fear the troubles it may have in store for them; their misgiving about their own frailty predisposes them to fall again into some bad habit or unfortunate

failing; they do not see how they are to maintain their present fervour; they would like to know something consoling about the future; its uncertainty causes them anxiety; or they are especially disconcerted by the thought of death, and by the notions which they form of the kind of death which theirs may be. What remedy should be applied for such misgivings? If such be your case, think on what our Lord said: 'Be not . . . solicitous for tomorrow, for the morrow will be solicitous for itself. Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof' (St. Matt. vi. 34). While your conduct does not give serious cause to arouse your misgivings about the future, the virtue of hope demands that you trust in God, with a full and unshaken confidence that He will give you every grace necessary for your salvation. But if your lives need correction, then necessarily you should seek the grace of repentance and true amendment, and trust in the mercy and goodness of God that He will grant you this grace, and that it will be ample and efficacious. We read in the 'Imitation of Christ' that when a certain devout person—most likely the author of the work—'was anxious about the future, and said: "If I did but know that I shall still persevere!" an interior voice replied: "And if thou didst know this, what wouldst thou do? Do now what thou wouldst then do, and thou shalt be very secure"' (Book I., chap. xxv.) The devout person thereupon committed himself to the Divine Will, and his trouble of mind ceased. While, therefore, you place no obstacle to God's merciful designs, while you strive to accomplish

the duties of your holy calling, and avail yourselves of the means of salvation, there is no reason why you should not keep yourselves in peace about the future. You are in God's hands, and He has His designs concerning you. Do you not trust Him? Ask yourselves of what practical utility your despondency will be to you. You perceive that it is a disturbing element in your spiritual life; whereas your confidence in God (of which I shall treat in another conference) will bring you help from on high (Ps. cxx. 1).

What an instructive example of this holy confidence you behold in David, who, with all his piety, was not, you know, without his failings. Listen to his expressions of trust and hope: 'In the Lord I put my trust' (Ps. x. 2); 'The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? The Lord is the protector of my life: of whom shall I be afraid?' (Ps. xxvi. 1): 'Thou art my strength and my refuge' (Ps. xxx. 4); 'Hope in God' (Ps. xli. 6). Imitate David in your trust in God. You may be painfully conscious of your frailty, but let God be your support at the present, and the firm foundation of your hope for the future. As to your future, then, in this world, it is in God's hands; leave it there with full confidence, and with entire conformity to the Divine Will.

It is admitted that human frailty is great, that it manifests itself in many ways, and that it is likely to accompany you through life. You will find shelter, guidance, and strength in observing the wise prescriptions of your holy rules. They mark out for

you the path that you should tread, the precautions that you should employ, and the means that you should use, to reach without fail the perfection of your state in this world, and the promised land of your heavenly reward in the world to come. What line of conduct will you follow with security, if not the one delineated in that holy Code ?

You need not to go in this direction or in that in search of a guide for a manner of life which shall be a sure and reassuring one; you have it clearly mapped out for you in your holy rules. Your book of rules conveys throughout wise lessons and directions; and the observances of your religious life are holy, sanctifying, and meritorious. If you perform, day by day and week by week, dutifully and piously, the duties and exercises marked out for you, and approach piously the holy sacraments, then you will surely receive all the graces that you need to combat human frailty, and to live in religion in a manner pleasing to God. Be resolved to do these things, and God will reward in many ways your fidelity and piety, and watch over you with a loving, special providence. Your daily life will be a daily preparation for a happy death; and you may with confidence expect to receive from God the supreme and crowning grace of final perseverance, which—though beyond the reach of all merit—is not withheld in our Lord's promises; for He has said—and let His words urge you onward to victory—' Be thou faithful until death, and I will give thee the crown of life ' (Apoc. ii. 10).

Build up, then, by this rule and plumb-line, the

walls in whose strength and protection you mean to trust, and you will make them firm and impregnable. God, Who guides the hand of holy Founders in drawing up the rules that their children are to follow, will bless in many ways those who are faithful in observing them. You cannot persistently neglect your religious exercises without serious spiritual detriment; whereas your faithful observance of them will preserve you from many faults, indiscretions, and dangers to which human frailty exposes you. Let this be your firm hope and confidence; and strive ever to walk in that wise path of regular observance by which so many saintly religious have proceeded and reached their crown. 'Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and make straight steps with your feet; that no one, halting, may go out of the way' (Heb. xii. 12, 13).

XIX.

RECOURSE TO THE SACRED HEART.

'Come to Me, all you that labour, and are burdened, and I will refresh you.'—St. Matt. xi. 28.

By these words of our Lord, so full of tenderness and sympathy, we are invited to draw near to the Sacred Heart; and as It is the fountain of all graces, we may count upon finding in It the light, strength, and consolation that our soul needs. Within It there is room not only for the faithful soul, but also and even for the repentant one that is weary of sin. From It no followers of Jesus will be rejected who humbly, earnestly, and trustfully seek mercy, fortitude, and peace. Do you not see and understand why our Lord clothed Himself with our humanity—why, as St. Paul tells us, He 'emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant' (Phil. ii. 7)? Besides the reason of the supreme mystery of Redemption accomplished in His Sacred Humanity, was it not that God might bring Himself nearer to His servants to be more fully known by them, and even that He might be bound more closely to them by the ties of a common nature (1 St. John i. 1); and, as St. John says, in order that 'our fellowship may be with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ' (verse 3)?

Let us, then, be ever filled with sentiments of admiration and gratitude in presence of this mystery of Divine condescension. With what consolation and hope it should inspire us! We realize it more and more as we study our Divine Lord's life, words, and actions, especially in the many works and discourses in which He displays the tenderness of His Sacred Heart. When we have weighed all these well, it comes upon us with less of a surprise that He should address Himself to us and say: 'Come to Me.' We shall have learned how He yearned for us in all the tenderness of the compassion of the Good Samaritan, of the Father of the prodigal son, and of the Good Shepherd. He extends His arms to us, and He opens His Sacred Heart to us, and says: 'Come to Me, all you that labour and are burdened, and I will refresh you.' We will not keep away from Him; we dare not. For us His invitation is a command. Go, then, to His Sacred Heart, even burdened as you are with your imperfections, cares, and sorrows, and with all the difficulties that beset you in the work of your sanctification and salvation. The Sacred Heart will be to you a school of virtue and perfection, a place of refuge and consolation, and a bulwark of strength and support.

Every devout Christian experiences a trial to himself in his own spiritual infirmities. He knows that he should be humble, meek, charitable, unsensual, and patient, but he sees himself far otherwise. He is not indifferent to this condition of infirmity which he discovers in himself, and which he recognizes as the cause not only of many imperfections

in his conduct, but also of the sins that he has to expose for absolution in the sacred tribunal. You also experience some such trial, and this is the first burden which you should carry to the Sacred Heart. But remark, the learner in a school of art has not only to correct the mistakes that he regrets to see in his work, he has moreover to study his model, and conform his work to it. So should it be with you. It is not enough only to lament over your spiritual infirmities and to repent of your falls; you should also look up to your model, Jesus Christ your Divine Lord, and by the study of His life and virtues, accompanied by earnest prayer, you should strive to imitate Him. This He, indeed, deigns to invite you to do, saying: 'Learn of Me, because I am meek, and humble of heart' (St. Matt. xi. 29); and then He goes on to assure you of the happy gain that will be yours if you do thus strive to learn of Him, adding: 'You shall find rest to your souls.' Go, then, to the Sacred Heart as to a school of virtue and perfection, and continue to attend this school all your life, because therein you will always have lessons to learn necessary for your correction, warning, encouragement, consolation, and spiritual advancement. Do not weary of studying your Divine Master, and of listening to His teaching. Beg of Him to instruct you, as did Nicodemus, saying: 'We know that Thou art come a teacher from God' (St. John iii 2); and sit at His Sacred Feet as did Mary, with the approval and commendation of our Lord, Who said that she had chosen the best part, which should not be taken away from her (St. Luke x. 42).

You may wish to know in what way you are to carry out this advice. In the first place, you should do it by the practice of interior union with our Lord, by walking in His presence, and by frequent and fervent ejaculations addressed to Him. God said to Abraham: 'Walk before Me, and be perfect' (Gen. xvii. 1); and our Lord said to His apostles: 'Abide in Me, and I in you' (St. John xv. 4). If you deem this practice difficult, that should not prevent you from aspiring to it. You may, however, go daily to the school of Christ, by careful and pious meditation on His life and virtues; and this the rule of your Institute requires you to do. Study in your meditations, not only the exterior acts of our Lord's life, but enter also into His Sacred Heart to learn therein what His dispositions and virtues were, and what yours also should be. St. Paul says that in Him 'are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge' (Col. ii. 3). The treasure-house is within, in His Sacred Heart, and there you should dive in to find them. Go, then, day by day, to this school of virtue and perfection; there you will find the treasure of treasures, Divine charity; there you will become more and more conscious, but without discouragement, of your faults and frailties; there you will study the consoling lessons of God's love, mercy, compassion, and goodness; there you will learn to rise above the world and its paltry distinctions and empty pleasures; there you will be taught lessons of humility, charity, meekness, patience, submission, fervour, zeal, and every virtue and perfection; and there you will be weaned from all affection towards

what is in any way evil, and you will be led to strive earnestly to correct your failings. Set, therefore, great value on your daily meditation. See if you cannot trace to some neglect, or want of care in making it, the various faults of which you are conscious, or the tepidity and indifference that there may be in your religious life and observance. Only be faithful in thus having recourse to the Sacred Heart, and you will store up lessons which will avail you for your guidance in all your difficulties, and for the correction of your failings. 'Come to Me,' our Lord deigns to say, 'all you who labour and are burdened, and I will refresh you.'

You are not without your cares and sorrows, and these weigh upon you as a burden; they are a burden from which you will not be able to escape. What, then, must you do? You must only seek support under it, and any consolation that will make it lighter. Under your cares and sorrows run to the Sacred Heart, as to a place of refuge and consolation. Our Lord—all-unchangeable as He is—is no less tender and compassionate now than He was when the people of Galilee and Judea carried their sick to Him to be healed; and you have no less claim upon His Divine sympathy than they had. Isaias prophesied of Him: 'Surely He hath borne our infirmities and carried our sorrows' (liii. 4). He will be a refuge to His followers in their sorrows until the end of all time. Your cares and sorrows are a trial that He Himself sends you, or permits, in order to test your love, and to afford you an opportunity of merit; but He is ever at hand to support and even to

console you under them. You are not so unspiritual, or so immortified, as to expect that He will at once brush away all your cares; He will always do what is for the best, but this would not be for the best. When these kinds of trial weigh upon you, you should carry your burden to the Sacred Heart, as to a place of refuge and consolation. They are intended as a means to promote your sanctification, but you need the grace to act bravely, patiently, and religiously under them. If you are not supported by spiritual aid they may weigh you down, and then they may come upon you and pass away, leaving you less perfect than they found you.

How should this advice be followed? If you practise union with God, then heart will speak to heart; you will bear your trial in union with our Lord, and conform yourselves to the Divine Will in all its appointments; and God will bestow all the graces you need to bear you up under the trial. If you do not pretend to be adept in this holy practice, then you should have recourse to prayer; and in prayer also will heart speak to heart. Pray interiorly and pray vocally, from time to time, under the trial, thus leaning upon our Lord; and He will help you to support the burden. 'Come to Me,' He says in His tender invitation, 'and I will refresh you.' Pray to the Sacred Heart; hide your head in It, as in a cleft of the rock (Cant. ii. 14), to seek there security from the storm. And while thus having recourse to our Lord, to beseech Him to support you under your cares and sorrows, show your earnestness by greater zeal in correcting your

faults, and in living up to religious observance. It is only becoming that, if you wish any favour at our Lord's hands, you should, on your part, strive to merit the favour by a special effort to please Him. How many there are who, in dealing with Him, wish to receive everything and to give nothing. This is not what a humble and earnest suppliant, without any merits, should do; he should make some effort to propitiate the person from whom he seeks a benefit. Strive, then, to give power to your prayer in the way suggested. If you do so, your prayer will not only reach the door of the Sacred Heart, it will penetrate within It; it will move your Divine Saviour to listen to you, and to afford you the fortitude, patience, peace, and consolation which your weary and tried spirit so sorely needs.

There is especially one place to which you should betake yourselves under severe trial—namely, to the sanctified spot where the Blessed Sacrament is reserved. No royal banner floats over the palace of your King, no mounted guards or massive gates bar the way; a tiny lamp burns before the Presence, and approach is open to all. But it is the Sanctuary of the King; Jesus is there under the humble veils of the Sacred Host. Before the Blessed Sacrament have knelt both Saints and sinners, drawn there by faith in the Real Presence, and by confidence in the hearing that Jesus would give to their prayers. Of the temple built by Solomon, God said: 'My eyes and My heart shall be there always' (3 Kings ix. 3). The temples of the New Law are wonder-

fully multiplied, and in every one of them where the Blessed Sacrament is reserved, the Eyes and Heart of Jesus are present; His Eyes to see you as you kneel before Him, and to see all your needs; His Sacred Heart to feel for you, and to grant your requests. Be faithful, then, in making your visit to the Blessed Sacrament, and when before the holy Tabernacle expose to the Sacred Heart of Jesus all your wants, cares, and sorrows. You will not speak in vain to that most tender Heart, for our Lord said: 'Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you' (St. Matt. vii. 7). How many have gone before the Tabernacle with a heavy heart, and have come away strengthened and consoled and prepared to face with fresh energy and courage the difficulties of life! You may hope for a like experience if with love and confidence you seek there the help and consolation which you need.

You have one great work to accomplish, towards which all your other works should tend, and this all-important work is your salvation. It is beset with difficulties, and, notwithstanding your good dispositions, it will not leave you free from all anxiety until it has been actually accomplished. You have spiritual enemies to contend with, both within and without, in every place, and at every time; and this constitutes the real battle of life. The Sacred Heart will be to you a bulwark of strength and support, and you will be able to say with David: 'Thou art my refuge from the trouble which hath encompassed me' (Ps. xxxi. 7). In a

spiritual warfare you need to employ spiritual weapons, such as self-denial, prayer, and the holy sacraments. How highly you should value as a source of security Holy Communion, wherein is especially manifested the love of the Sacred Heart! In Baptism God gave you spiritual life and clothed your soul with the garment of His children; in Confirmation He gave you spiritual growth and strength; in Penance He cleanses or renews the garment of grace; but in Holy Communion He personally takes possession of the heart, to purify, sanctify, strengthen, and console it. In Holy Communion the Blessed Eucharist is to you the Bread of Life (St. John vi. 48), the nourishment by which your soul is to be sustained and brought to eternal life. It is to you not only the means of attaining life everlasting, but also a Divine pledge assuring you of it, as conveyed in our Lord's promise: 'He that eateth My Flesh, and drinketh My Blood, hath everlasting life; and I will raise him up in the last day' (St. John vi. 55). Where, then, shall you seek with greater confidence than in Holy Communion the strength and support that you need in working out your salvation? Herein our Lord does more than bring you under the shadow of His wings (Ps. xvi. 8); He takes you up in the arms of His Omnipotence, He presses you to His Sacred Heart, He gives Himself to you. With David, then, you may exclaim with sentiments of confidence and delight: 'Though I should walk in the midst of the shadow of death, I will fear no evils, for Thou art with me' (Ps. xxii. 4). Especi-

ally in this sacrament we may see the fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaias: 'Behold, God is my Saviour, I will deal confidently, and will not fear; because the Lord is my strength, and my praise, and He is become my salvation. You shall draw waters with joy out of the Saviour's fountains' (Isa. xii. 2, 3). You are no longer 'in a desert land where there is no way, and no water' (Ps. lxii. 3); for Christ has made His Church the rich pasturage, as expressed by David, where he said: 'He hath set me in a place of pasture; He hath brought me up on the water of refreshment, . . . He hath led me on the paths of justice' (Ps. xxii. 2, 3). In the Holy Eucharist are realized these unspeakable benefits. What our Lord said to Zacheus, when He entered into his house and was becomingly received by him, He virtually says to you when you receive Him in Holy Communion: 'This day is salvation come to this house. . . . For the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost' (St. Luke xix. 9, 10); for do you not remark how the burden of our Lord's references to this great sacrament is a message of life and salvation? The same message is conveyed in the prophecies; thus Zacharias says: 'What is the good thing of Him, and what is His beautiful thing, but the corn of the elect, the wine springing forth virgins?' (ix. 17). What is the message of the Sacred Heart to you in this holy sacrament? 'He that eateth this Bread shall live for ever' (St. John vi. 59). What difficulty in the way of salvation can you conceive that may not be overcome by the sacra-

mental grace of the Holy Eucharist? It is a remedy against the power of your passions, it overcomes tepidity, and it shields you against the darts of the Evil One. Only do your best to dispose yourselves for a worthy and fervent reception of so great a sacrament, and it will convey to your soul every grace that you need. But if you have not prepared yourselves well, and if, after Holy Communion, you do not feel any of the effects of the spiritual food of which you have partaken, then St. Bonaventure says, 'it is a sign that your soul is either sick or dead. You have,' he says, 'put fire into your bosom and you do not feel its heat, honey into your mouth and you do not taste its sweetness.' You, however, do not merit this reproach, you who prepare yourselves so devoutly and receive Holy Communion with so much reverence and fervour. By every Communion, then, you make your salvation more secure; and your Divine Lord and Master will draw your affections more closely to Himself, and raise up a bulwark of protection between you and your spiritual enemies. See, then, what comfort you should derive from the love of the Sacred Heart displayed in this great sacrament. How it should lessen your misgiving and soothe your anxiety about the accomplishment of your salvation! In this sacrament, too, our Lord says to you: 'Come to Me, all you that labour, and are burdened, and I will refresh you.' Through this sacrament you are, as St. Paul says, 'rooted and built up in Him' (Col. ii. 7); herein His Sacred Heart is to you an ark of salva-

tion, in which you may dwell securely and confidently.

Ponder, then, on what the Sacred Heart of Jesus is to you, that you may feel yourselves drawn more closely to It. The more piously and faithfully you love and worship It, the more abundant will be the fruits of sanctification which you will derive from It. Happy you, if you study its virtues, and strive to imitate them! Happy you, if you have recourse to It in your cares and sorrows! Happy you, if you become united to It, and seek Its help and protection through the life-giving Eucharist! The battle of life is still raging; it is not yet the time to repose in victory in that Divine Heart Which has been so true, so generous, so loving towards you. That Heart has laboured, so must you; that Heart has suffered, so must you; that Heart has glorified God, so must you. Reward and repose will come in their own time. In the meantime, consecrate yourselves anew to the Sacred Heart; put It as a seal upon your heart: 'Put Me as a seal upon thy heart, as a seal upon thy arm' (Cant. viii. 6)—that is, let your affections and your works bear the seal of Divine charity: do not forget God's full claim to both. Thus will you have your lamps burning, waiting for the coming of the Bridegroom.

SEVENTH DAY.

XX.

CONFIDENCE IN GOD.

'Casting all your care upon Him, for He hath care of you.'—1 St. Pet. v. 7.

If your previous meditations have convinced you of the holiness and blessedness of your calling, and of the necessity of fulfilling its obligations; and if your self-examination has shown you your shortcomings and filled you with mistrust in yourselves on account of your weakness and fickleness—even so, you should not give way to discouragement.

On the one hand, it is true, if you would be wise and stand firm, you must always mistrust yourselves, knowing the feebleness and perversity of human nature; but, at the same time, you should always, on the other hand, have unbounded confidence in God, resting upon your lively faith in His infinite power, wisdom, goodness, love, and compassion. 'We are not,' St. Paul tells us, 'sufficient to think anything of ourselves, as of ourselves: but our sufficiency is from God' (2 Cor. iii. 5). Much is, indeed, required of you as religious, consecrated to God; but you look for every grace from Him Who

can and will bestow upon you more than you ask at His hands, provided that you ask aright. One of the dispositions necessary for the success of your pleading is confidence. St. James says on this point: 'If any of you want wisdom, let him ask of God, Who giveth to all men abundantly, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, which is moved and carried about by the wind. Therefore let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord' (i. 5-7). Even as children run to their father, as the poor seek relief from the rich, and as the weak cast themselves upon the protection of the strong, so should you have recourse to God in all your difficulties and necessities, but take care to pray to Him with childlike trust and confidence.

Consider now some of the difficulties in which you should show your dependence upon God, and seek courage and strength from Him—difficulties in which you should display your unshaken confidence in Him.

Perhaps your first anxiety is about your sanctification, about your living as perfect a life as your state demands. This is a most reasonable anxiety; if you are actuated by it, it is certainly a sign that you realize your responsibility. Many virtues are expected in religious, and a zeal for all that is good; greater sanctity is expected in them than in seculars. See what means of grace and, therefore, of sanctification are provided for you—the daily Mass, frequent Communion, weekly confession, meditation, and prayer, the rosary, spiritual reading, and

examination of conscience. Then there is also the care that your religious superiors have of your welfare. Moreover, you are assisted by the companionship and good example of others who, like yourselves, belong to God by a special title of consecration. You have also holy vows to keep, and religious rules to observe. All these are valuable means of sanctification; but how will the case be if you do not avail yourselves of them, and if you do not dutifully correspond with the graces they afford?

While, on the one hand, you acknowledge your responsibility, on the other, you should check undue anxiety, and be careful not to give way to discouragement; for, in the first place, it is not pretended that you are under a strict obligation to perform all your actions in the most perfect manner, no matter how desirable it may be to do so. Then, in the second place, it is not pretended that you cease to fulfil your obligation to tend to perfection, if from one cause or another your progress is slow, or if you even make delay on the way, or if you do not turn all your opportunities to account; although, undoubtedly, you should strive to make steady progress always, and to make the most of your opportunities. Lastly, if you are not consciously and deliberately leading a careless and unfaithful religious life, you should not allow occasional infidelities and venial faults to discourage you or destroy your peace of mind; as such shortcomings are likely to occur under the present conditions of our existence. What is needed is to repent speedily of them, and to try to avoid a recurrence of them.

In thus saying that you are not under an obligation of doing your utmost; that, while still tending to perfection, you may sometimes find yourselves dallying on the way; and that at times you may discover yourselves guilty of venial infidelities, a concession is made to human frailty which it is necessary to make (1 Cor. iii. 12), but with the understanding that you still esteem your vocation and are anxious to fulfil its obligations. These considerations, which are just, should help to allay unnecessary alarm and misgiving; but they are not intended to give sanction to non-observance, indifference, or sloth, or to afford shelter for any erroneous notions concerning the obligations of the religious state. You know that your determined and continuous efforts should be directed, not to undermine the edifice of your sanctification, but to give it stability.

Direct now your attention to a consideration that should give you confidence when anxiety arises as to your corresponding with your vocation. You recognize the holiness of your vocation, and at the same time your own imperfections and weakness. But Who has called you to the religious life? And Who, therefore, has imposed upon you the obligations belonging to your holy calling? Is it not God Himself Who has done this? 'I have chosen you' (St. John xv. 16). He then will bestow abundantly upon you all the graces that you need to enable you to correspond with your vocation, and to fulfil faithfully the duties of your state. This may not be called into doubt. You have, indeed, practical proof of it in the devout lives of so many religious.

If, therefore, there are religious who have fallen from their first fervour, and who are indevout and disedifying, it is not that anything has been wanting upon God's part; but the fault is entirely their own.

It is comforting to reflect that even if any religious have been at fault, they may repair it. If religious have not been living up to the perfection of their calling, they should not despair of doing better. Ah, no. They should frankly acknowledge their culpability, and sincerely repent of their negligence, and grieve for having perhaps brought reproach upon religion by their conduct.

They should look upon the occasion of a retreat as an invitation from our Lord to return to their former fervour in His service. When, upon the death of Lazarus, our Lord drew near to the town of Mary and Martha in Bethania, Martha hurried to meet Him—this is a picture of fervent religious. Mary had stayed at home—a picture of religious held back by imperfections. Then Martha, whose zeal joined with discretion we admire, 'went and called her sister Mary secretly, saying: The Master is come, and calleth for thee.' Mary is touched by the message: 'She, as soon as she heard this, riseth quickly and cometh to Him' (St. John xi. 28, 29). This is what lax religious should do; they should rise quickly. The preacher performs the part of Martha in conveying our Lord's message: 'He is come, and He calls for you. Arise quickly, and go to Him.'

This gracious call should move careless religious to renew their confidence in God, Who will bestow His grace freely in response to prayer, and bring them

back to fervour and sustain them in it—provided that they co-operate with His all-necessary grace. 'Nothing,' says St. Paul, 'is wanting to you in any grace' (1 Cor. i. 7).

Another anxiety that may weigh upon you is your duty to others. Some members of the community are occupied in labouring for others. This may be called their special work in the Church. Among the distinguishing ornaments of the Church are the grand spiritual and corporal works of mercy to which so many religious devote themselves, and in which they spend themselves, their resources, their time, and their lives. The misgivings that, in your case, may arise as to such duties, proceed from uncertainty as to the purity of the motives by which you are actuated, and from neglect or indifference in fulfilling your charge. You recognize that any faultiness or neglect is likely to affect not only yourselves, but also those who are the objects of your care and devotedness. You know what self-denial, patience, charity, discretion, and other virtues you need in the discharge of these duties. Undoubtedly you require special help from God. Be not discouraged, but renew your confidence in God, Who will bestow this special help. Those for whom you labour belong by a first title to Him, and it is, moreover, for His sake, and as His servants, that you devote yourselves to the labour. You may, then, say that the work is doubly God's, and be therefore confident that He will supply all the graces and helps that you need in its accomplishment. Do not, however, cease to beg God's blessing upon

it, that it may be for His glory, and consecrate your devotedness to Him, that it may be successful and meritorious. 'Cast thy care upon the Lord,' says the Royal Prophet, 'and He shall sustain thee' (Ps. liv. 23).

A third source of anxiety arises from the warfare of life: you have to do battle with the devil, the world, and the flesh. It is not only seculars who have to contend with these dangerous and persistent enemies, but religious also are exposed to their snares and assaults. It is even possible that these foes of the Christian may reserve their deadliest venom and most persevering efforts for the chosen souls whom God, by a special vocation, calls away from the ordinary paths of life.

When Satan lays his secret snares, or when he leads you all unawares into some strong temptation; when he renews the assault with redoubled vigour; and even if he should come back with seven other spirits more malignant than himself, be not dismayed. Pray, cease not to pray; the Divine Lord Whose servants you are, will protect and help you. 'Put you on,' says St. Paul, 'the armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the deceits of the devil' (Eph. vi. 11). St. Paul repeats the advice, to invite you to courage and confidence, and to show that, God helping you, you will not be overcome by the temptation. 'Therefore,' he says, 'take unto you the armour of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and to stand in all things perfect' (vi. 13). You may even venture to believe that God will give religious very special aids,

that they may not succumb to the temptation. When the tempest has reached its height, our Lord will, as it were, command the winds and waves raised against them by the temptation, and say 'Peace, be still'; and there will come a great calm. These assaults of Satan are a severe interior trial. Sometimes they come as violent movements to anger, dislike, bitterness, or resentment; sometimes as discontent, discouragement, disgust with your vocation, or despondency; sometimes as doubts against faith, or mistrust of God and His providence; and at other times, as frightful and unaccountable imaginations and pictures, or as sudden promptings to evil. Be not disconcerted; it is not you who have caused them, and you are not responsible for them; but you must struggle against them. If you pray, and do battle valiantly against them, you will gain great merit. Be not disconcerted, for you know that God has so ordained your temptations that none shall be what it is beyond your strength to resist and overcome, supported as you will be by His grace. 'God is faithful,' St. Paul says, 'Who will not suffer you to be tempted above that which you are able: but will make also with temptation issue, that you may be able to bear it' (1 Cor. x. 13). Do battle, then, confidently with the enemy, mistrusting, indeed, your own strength, but placing unlimited trust in the power and goodness of God to shield and save you.

The second enemy is the world, that world which perhaps you are so willing to please, but which all the time is trying to lead you from God. By 'the

world' no one means the pious people who esteem and respect religious because they are religious, and who like to see them all that they should be in piety and conduct; but we mean every class of persons who, whether wittingly or unwittingly, whether for aims of their own, or through misguided friendship, would lead religious to neglect their duties, to enter into intrigues, or to descend to unreligious conduct; or who would draw to themselves a particular affection and attachment. By 'the world' we mean persons who would lead religious to distaste for their vocation, to disregard of their rules, observances and obligations, and to breaches of their vows of poverty and obedience.

There is no need to go further in describing what is meant by 'the world'; it could easily be painted in more terrifying colours. There lie, beyond the limits of what has been described, more appalling dangers and deeper precipices; there are the ways of scandal and apostasy, which lead to the abyss.

But with regard to that other world which seems less objectionable, do not deceive yourselves: even this is a world that can and will cause you to fall from your fervour if you yield to its influence. It will lead you to infidelity to your rule, to dissipation of mind, and to various venial sins—not, let us hope, to mortal sin, although that, too, is possible; for you know that the holier your calling is, so much the greater should be your care to protect and foster your grace; and if you do expose yourselves to a fall, the fall may be a serious one. 'Go not,' says the Book of Ecclesiasticus, 'in the way of ruin, and thou

shalt not stumble against the stones; trust not thyself to a rugged way, lest thou set a stumbling-block to thy soul' (xxxii. 25). What, therefore, you should do, is to keep away from all danger, when once you perceive any; yet, if there be danger in the necessary fulfilment of any of your duties, you should be filled with confidence that God will most surely protect you. No matter what snares the world may then lay for you, you will be shielded by the Divine guardianship. 'In the world,' said our Blessed Lord to His disciples, 'you shall have distress: but have confidence, I have overcome the world' (St. John xvi. 33).

The third enemy is the domestic enemy of your own passions of every kind, an enemy which not only may rise against you because of its own proclivities, but which may also be incited to rebellion by the instigation of your other enemies, the devil and the world. Therefore is it held to be man's most dangerous foe. Why has it, perhaps, been able to count so many victories gained over you? You have been at fault, because you did not watch and pray; you were taken unawares, or you were deluded. The malice, as is usual, was cloaked until you had fallen; you saw it, perhaps, but you did not realize it. When you are composed and fervent, you see the moral deformity of anger, pride, concupiscence, intemperance, envy, jealousy, and every other unruly passion; and you recognize the terrible consequences that they may bring upon your soul, your life, and your future; but when temptation occurs—if you do not instantly spurn it and pray

against it—the vision of the truth becomes dim as the mists of passion arise, and presently you find yourselves vanquished. But all this need not have been in the past, and need not be again. What spiritual writers term the 'old man' (Rom. vi. 6) may yet cling to you; but it will only be to afford you more abundant merit and a more glorious victory. Our Lord said to St. Paul: 'My grace is sufficient for you' (2 Cor. xii. 9). Count upon the same consoling assurance. St. Paul, full of confidence, wrote: 'I can do all things in Him that strengthens me' (Phil. iv. 13). Do not lose heart; God will help you in all your contests with unruly passions. If you employ the necessary precautions, if you avoid known danger, and if you ask for God's help, God will not permit you to be overcome, but will give you victory over them. In this matter, too, be ever animated with unbounded confidence in the love, goodness, and compassion of God, that He will always hear you, and help and sustain you: 'Casting all your care upon Him, for He hath care of you.'

Lastly, consider how you should look confidently to God in the trials that will beset you on your way through life. These are sometimes, and perhaps mostly, interior, and at other times their cause is exterior. For the most part, as though by a special dispensation of a tender Providence, they are not of long duration; but one trial succeeds another, and thus will it be till the end. As long as you continue to be followers of Christ crucified, you must expect to experience something of the suffering and ignominy of the Passion. The measure of it will be

according to your grace. With St. Paul how great was the measure! 'Our flesh,' he wrote, 'had no rest, but we suffered all tribulation; combats without, fears within' (2 Cor. vii. 5). But how little you are asked to endure! There is, however, the constant drain and strain upon your forces in fulfilling your duties; there are your own trying faults of character; there is perhaps a disagreeable mannerism in some members of your community; there are bodily ailments and loss of spirits; there are various annoyances, interruptions, and contradictions; there are doubts, misgivings, and difficulties; there is fatigue, and sometimes there is pressure of work. All these things tell upon you, and become the little trials of which your life is made up. Alas, how little patience you have! How often, instead of being glad to have something to bear for God's sake, you have lost the merit of your suffering or inconvenience by petulancy, murmuring, and discontent! This was decidedly faulty. You should have confidence in the wisdom and goodness of God, Who sends you these little trials for your good. You should always embrace willingly and readily the whole will of God in your regard, and trust yourselves entirely and submissively to His good pleasure.

In the work of your sanctification, in the duties of your vocation, in your struggle against the devil, the world, and the flesh, and in the cares and trials of life, endeavour with God's help to possess your souls in patience. Renew now your faith in the loving providence and protection of God; and reanimate yourselves with unbounded confidence in

His help. 'To them that love God,' St. Paul assures us, 'all things work together unto good' (Rom. viii. 28).

We will not stay to dwell at any length upon the lessons of confidence which our Lord sought to impress upon His disciples. Call to mind His discourse about the lilies of the field; His rebuke when the Apostles, tossed about in the storm, saw our Lord walking on the sea, and the reassurance He would have them experience at His presence. 'It is I, fear ye not' (St. Matt. xiv. 27). You, too, are His, you have consecrated your lives to Him, and you are working for Him. He will know how to have a care of His own. If He were to deign to come among you now, He would still invite you to confidence. You are gathered together in retreat in His name, to seek His grace, to rest your weary souls, to imbibe fresh strength, to prepare yourselves to labour anew for Him, to give your steps a firmer tread and a more perfect direction; you who are his sworn friends and servants; you who have already laboured much, and perhaps sacrificed much for Him. And do you for a moment think that He will leave you to tread the weary way alone and unheeded, or that He will allow your souls to famish by the way? Ah, no! Our Lord will not deal with you in this manner: He will aid and sustain you. Have confidence!

Then look also with confidence towards your heavenly Mother. If she does not abandon the ordinary Christian wayfarer, but pleads unceasingly for all who invoke her patronage, what may you not hope that she will do for you, who are consecrated

to her Divine Son, and who belong also to her by a special title. Be sure that she will ever watch over you, and aid you by her all-powerful intercession. Count also, in your labours, difficulties, temptations, and sorrows, upon the protection and prayers of your Guardian Angels and holy Patrons; they, too, will help you. Pilgrims of earth as you are, these citizens of the kingdom of heaven will watch over you and pray for you.

And now, in conclusion, take comfort from the thought that, as religious, you are the special objects of God's love. No matter how arduous may be your labour, how weighty your responsibility, how strong the temptation that assails you, or how severe the trial that overtakes you, trust ever in God and in His love for you, 'casting all your care upon Him, for He hath care of you.' Let this confidence sustain you during the whole course of your lives; and may it fill you with the hope that God will crown all His other graces with the indispensable gift of final perseverance. 'It is good for me,' said David, 'to adhere to my God, to put my hope in the Lord God: that I may declare all Thy praises, in the gates of the daughter of Sion' (Ps. lxxii. 28).

XXI.

RECOMPENSE.

'Blessed are they that are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb.'—Apoc. xix. 9.

Long and dreary to the devout Christian seems the way of this life, with its labours, cares, and sorrows. This desert of his earthly pilgrimage has no greater charms for him as he advances farther into it. The satisfaction, whether of riches or pleasures, offered him by the world is empty, unreal, unsatiating, superficial, and fleeting; he seeks it not, but fixes his gaze on the horizon of life. Welcome to him would be the sight of the promised land; he yearns for the vision of God. Yet a little while longer, and his desires shall be realized; as Isaias says: 'He shall dwell on high. . . . His eyes shall see the King in His beauty' (xxxiii. 16, 17). Not that the devout Christian is sad while awaiting the realization of his hopes; for he conforms himself to the Divine Will, seeking ever to please God and thus add to his merits. You see him therefore patient, even-minded, joyous, and thankful; although under his afflictions and disappointments he may exclaim with David: 'Woe is me, that my sojourning is prolonged' (Ps. cxix. 5); and, under his temptations, with St. Paul: 'Unhappy man that I am, who shall deliver me from

the body of this death?' (Rom. vii. 24). But the reward will come at last.

Reflect now upon the recompense which God has in reserve for you, and for all who die in the state of grace. The subject is one to inspire you with thankfulness and love, and with fervour and generosity.

When our Lord, with every manifestation of deep feeling, brought Lazarus back to life, the witnesses said: 'Behold how He loved him.' How short and laborious, however, was the life that was renewed in Lazarus! What shall we say when we contemplate the everlasting life of happiness and glory to which our Lord invites us? when we consider, moreover, at what a cost He has merited for us so great a beatitude as that which He has prepared for us? Should we not be overwhelmed with sentiments of thankfulness, seeing what infinite love is displayed in this dispensation of His providence? We may say: 'Behold how He has loved us!' He has assumed our nature and bound it by an everlasting union to His Divine Nature, so that, by this hypostatic union, He will ever be both God and man. He has enriched us with Divine grace, by it uniting us to His mystical body, and He gives Himself sacramentally to us in the Blessed Eucharist. Is not this enough? Will He not tire of us, all-unworthy, lowly, and miserable as we are? No; He will yet bring us to His heavenly kingdom, to bestow upon us yet greater favours, and to have us with Himself for all eternity. Our earthly existence is to be followed by everlasting felicity in the possession and

enjoyment of God. As we cannot comprehend God, we cannot comprehend how great is the happiness of possessing and enjoying Him. 'I am thy reward exceeding great' (Gen. xv. 1). This was God's promise and assurance given to Abraham. 'Be glad and rejoice,' our Lord said, 'for your reward is very great in heaven' (St. Matt. v. 12). St. Paul, quoting the prophet Isaias, describes in these words this unspeakable recompense: 'Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, what things God hath prepared for them that love Him' (1 Cor. ii. 9). Is it surprising that to secure this happiness, which God bestows as a reward that must be merited, martyrs have undergone such tortures, confessors have undertaken such labours, monks and hermits have quitted their homes, virgins have consecrated themselves to God, and men and women in every age have been heroic in their charity and self-sacrifice?

What a contrast there is between our present existence and our future life in heaven! The sufferings of humanity point to a great evil that has been committed; they are an evidence of the existence of sin; and, united to the merits of Christ crucified, they are a continual atonement to God for sin (Col. i. 24). In our present life we all suffer, and to our sufferings are joined many human miseries; we are weak, inconstant, passionate; right reason meets constantly with opposition on the part of both our interior and exterior faculties; we are ignorant and easily deluded; and we are exposed to diseases, calamities, misfortunes, sorrows, and death. On

earth we find no remedy for all our miseries, no protection against misfortune, and no security against death; on earth we experience no perfect rest and no full contentment. All this is so because our existence on earth is our time of trial and merit; it is not a stable or our enduring existence; as St. Paul says: 'We have not here a lasting city, but we seek one that is to come' (Heb. xiii. 14).

Consider now the conditions of the future existence of the Blessed in heaven, that you may contrast it with our present existence which we have briefly depicted. In heaven God's elect will be free from every evil, and blessed with every good. If, then, we have sorrow here below, it will be changed into joy, and our joy no man shall take from us (St. John xvi. 22). There is a contrast, as between riches and poverty, plenty and want, joy and sorrow, happiness and misery, peace and war, life and death, eternity and time.

The first striking feature of the heavenly reward is the entire absence of every kind of evil or misery. Accustomed as we are to every variety of suffering and annoyance, we cannot well conceive what it will be to be entirely and for ever free from everything of the kind. We read in the Apocalypse: 'God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and death shall be no more, nor mourning, nor crying, nor sorrow shall be any more, for the former things are passed away' (xxi. 4). Try to realize how happy God's elect shall be when free from pain, personal defect, anxiety, sorrow, doubt, uneasiness, persecution, annoyance, temptation, misgiving, disap-

pointment, envy, weariness, vice, passion, danger, fear, solicitude, heat, cold, disease, and death. This universal relief in itself is a boon we shall treasure exceedingly; but what is it in comparison with the beatitude which will be added to it?

The essence of the happiness of the Saints is the beatific vision. By the light of glory, bestowed upon them by God, they see God as He is, they see the ever-adorable Trinity. All see Him, but some more perfectly than others, each one according to his merit. Thus is realized in their regard our Lord's promise, when He said: 'Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God' (St. Matt. v. 8). St. Paul teaches us the difference between our vision of God in this world by faith and the beatific vision of Him in heaven, where he says: 'We see now through a glass in a dark manner, but then face to face. Now I know in part; but then I shall know even as I am known' (1 Cor. xiii. 12). St. John gives us the same assurance where he says: 'We shall see Him as He is' (1 St. John iii. 2). We cannot form the least idea either of what we shall thus see in the light of glory, or of the unspeakable happiness with which we shall be ravished, enjoying throughout eternity this vision of God. This is the great good for which our soul longs, and which alone can fully satiate its desires. Just as the loss of the Only Sovereign and Supreme Good constitutes the greatest punishment of the reprobate, so does the possession of it constitute the essential reward of the Blessed.

We shall see the Second Person of the Most Holy

Trinity in His Sacred Humanity, Jesus Christ, our loving Saviour. Our happiness in seeing Him and being with Him in heaven will far exceed that which the apostles experienced in His company while with Him on earth. We remember how St. Peter at the Transfiguration on Thabor wished to erect there a tabernacle for Him; and being ravished with the sight of our Lord in that passing vision of His beauty, how he exclaimed: 'Lord, it is good for us to be here' (St. Matt. xvii. 4); but our Lord had not at that time entered into His glory; He had not yet accomplished the sacrifice, and achieved His final triumph, and taken possession of His kingdom with all His elect, as foretold by David: 'With Thee is the principality in the day of Thy strength, in the brightness of the Saints' (Ps. cix. 3). How inexpressible our joy will be to dwell in the everlasting tabernacle with our Lord, to praise Him for all His love and goodness, and to experience according to the measure of our capacity the tenderness of His Sacred Heart.

Another reward in heaven will be the blessedness of the companionship of all the Angels and Saints. There shall we behold our heavenly Queen and Mother in all her glory and beauty. Our eyes long for that sight, and we wish even now to realize as we should the fulness of our relationship with her: this relationship with all its joys will be realized only in heaven. There we shall bless her for all her care of us during our pilgrimage on earth; there we shall pay her the tribute of praise which becomes her as the Mother of God and Queen of Heaven;

there her love and her companionship will be to us a source of ineffable beatitude. How enraptured, too, we shall be to find ourselves for ever associated with the millions of Angels and Saints in a love and felicity without alloy, of which no delight of earth can furnish any idea. Among them we shall recognize our Guardian Angel, St. Joseph, our Holy Patrons, and all who were dear to us on earth and who are numbered with the Blessed. We shall be gathered with these and the countless multitude of the heavenly host before the throne of the Lamb, to celebrate unceasingly the nuptials of the Lamb with unspeakable bliss and rejoicings. 'Blessed are they that are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb' (Apoc. xix. 9).

Let us now dwell upon some features of this heavenly beatitude. It will be a state of glory and honour. David proclaims God's goodness to man, where he says: 'Thou hast made him a little less than the Angels, Thou hast crowned him with glory and honour' (Ps. viii. 6). Our present grace is the seed of glory. Supernatural grace is the garment of the soul in this world, and glory will be as the garment of both body and soul in their state of glory in heaven. In that heavenly kingdom we shall appear in the condition of beauty and splendour becoming us as its citizens, and as children of God. In the Book of Wisdom, speaking of the reward of the just, it is said: 'Therefore shall they receive a kingdom of glory, and a crown of beauty, at the hand of the Lord' (v. 17). St. Paul tells us 'of the glory to come which shall be revealed in us' (Rom. viii. 18).

What the endowments of a glorified being are, it is not given to us to know; but just as heaven itself is beyond everything we can imagine, so must we say that the glorious condition of the Blessed is beyond all thought or comprehension. Our Lord said: 'Then shall the just shine as the sun in the kingdom of their Father' (St. Matt. xiii. 43).

Our Lord tells us that our reward in heaven is 'very great' (St. Matt. v. 12). Now, although, being the happiness of creatures, it is not beyond all measure, it is yet beyond all measure that we in this world can ascribe to it. It will be apportioned to each according to the degree of charity and merit in which he died. That degree will determine the capacity for glory and happiness of each one of the elect, and his capacity for the fruition of God. Our Lord said to His Apostles: 'In My Father's house there are many mansions' (St. John xiv. 2); and St. Paul says: 'Star differeth from star in glory' (1 Cor. xv. 41). Each one of the Blessed will be satiated to the full measure of his capacity, and will therefore be supremely content with his happy lot, although he may see others among the Saints partaking of a larger fruition of the heavenly delights. 'They shall be inebriated,' says holy David, 'with the plenty of Thy house, and Thou shalt make them drink of the torrent of Thy pleasure' (Ps. xxxv. 9). This revelation expresses but feebly the real magnificence and measure of the heavenly happiness.

The just man relishes God to some extent in this life; therefore does David say: 'O taste, and see that the Lord is sweet' (Ps. xxxiii. 9); 'O how great is

the multitude of Thy sweetness, O Lord, which Thou hast hidden for them that fear Thee' (Ps. xxx. 20). Among the fruits of goodness and virtue resulting from grace, which the just man experiences, are a certain sweetness and delight that give him a relish for what is good. But how could we think of comparing these feelings with the sweetness and delight that in heaven will result from the fruition of the Sovereign Good? 'Thou shalt fill me with joy with Thy countenance,' said David; 'at Thy right hand are delights even to the end' (Ps. xv. 11). In heaven God will be tasted, not only in His gifts and favours, but also in Himself, thus ravishing the Blessed with unspeakable joy, sweetness, and delight.

The eternity of heaven conveys the idea of repose, peace, and true life. In our present unstable condition of existence we cannot find true rest or absolute peace; and a life that is of short duration, and that is ever exposed, as is our present life, to risks and dangers, does not merit the name. Our Lord said: 'They that have done good things shall come forth to the resurrection of life' (St. John v. 29), and this promised life shall be everlasting (vi. 55). All the glory and happiness which, we have seen, shall be the portion of the Blessed, shall be theirs for ever. How much this condition of our reward enhances inexpressibly and immeasurably its value! St. Paul says: 'That which is at present momentary and light of our tribulation, worketh for us above measure exceedingly an eternal weight of glory' (2 Cor. iv. 17). St. Peter tells us that this happy inheritance reserved for us in heaven, is one

that is 'incorruptible, undefiled, and that cannot fade' (1 St. Pet. i. 4); and speaking especially of the reward of good pastors, he says they 'shall receive a never-fading crown of glory' (v. 4). In heaven we shall continue in our blessedness as long as God shall be God. This is the belief which we profess every time that we say the Apostles' Creed, which ends with the doctrine of 'life everlasting.'

With only these few considerations before us of the conditions and features of the future recompense, are we not struck very forcibly with the contrast between our present existence on earth and the future existence in heaven that we hope shall be ours? On earth, that which is of earth cannot satisfy us; and we see God, as it were, only in a dark manner and by reflection, by faith; but in heaven we shall see Him as He is (1 Cor. xiii. 12). On earth we are associated with men doomed to the same experience of human miseries as ourselves, and with the scandalous and wicked, as well as with the good and imperfect; but in heaven we shall be associated with Angels and Saints. On earth whatever satisfaction we may experience is insignificant, but in heaven our satisfaction and enjoyment will be full, and all our desires shall be realized. On earth we meet with trials and miseries of every kind; but in heaven we shall be in a place of happiness and unspeakable delights. On earth our pilgrimage is short and uncertain; but in heaven our life will be without end.

And now consider the contrast between the labour on earth and the recompense in heaven; or rather,

keeping in mind the greatness of the happiness of heaven and the untold magnificence of the reward, see by what scanty effort, comparatively speaking, we may attain this surpassing recompense. Herein is seen a striking proof of God's infinite love and bounty.

God adopts us as sons and heirs; and just as a son and heir, as such, inherits his father's property without any great labour, provided only that he prove himself dutiful, so also does God deal with us, asking only that we should be dutiful. But as we have been the children of wrath by sin, we must bear in ourselves some little of the punishment of sin. St. Paul says: 'We are the sons of God; and if sons heirs also; heirs indeed of God, and joint-heirs with Christ: yet so, if we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified with Him.' Then he goes on to consider the contrast between the suffering or labour on the one side, and the immense recompense on the other; and he says: 'For I reckon that the sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come that shall be revealed in us' (Rom. viii. 16-18). Our labour is short, and it is accompanied by many satisfactions—such as they are—suitable to our present condition; our sufferings are light, and they are alleviated by many consolations; so that the devout Christian recognizes the truth of our Lord's words: 'My yoke is sweet, and My burden light' (St. Matt. xi. 30). The words of St. Peter of Alcantara do not therefore surprise us. This great Saint, of austere life, appeared after death to St. Teresa, and exclaimed: 'O happy penance which

has merited for me so great a reward!' Only read over the eight beatitudes and see what is required on the one hand, and what generous reward is bestowed on the other. We stand in astonishment and admiration of God's unspeakable bountifulness. Our Lord expressed it at one time in these words: 'Give, and it shall be given to you; good measure, and pressed down, and shaken together and running over, shall they give into your bosom' (St. Luke vi. 38).

While comforting yourselves with the thought of this most glorious and eternal recompense, ask yourselves how you are to merit it. 'Lord, who shall dwell in Thy tabernacle? or who shall rest in Thy holy hill?' This question is David's. He answers it thus: 'He that walketh without blemish and worketh justice' (Ps. xiv. 1, 2). The happiness of heaven is the reward of virtue, of fidelity to one's vocation, of labour for God, and of carrying the cross. You, happily, are walking in the path that leads to this everlasting tabernacle, and to this holy hill.

Persevere in the strait way that leads to life (St. Matt. vii. 14), and walk in it with a firm step. Perhaps at one time or another of your life you have faltered or stumbled on the way. This should not now dishearten you, but only make you more resolute for the future. Who is more desirous of your salvation than that loving Lord Who paid the price of it, and Who awaits you to bestow upon you the crown of life purchased by His own Precious Blood? Has He not called you to religion as to a place of security against all danger as regards your salvation?

Has He not made special promises to you, saying: 'Every one that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother . . . for My name's sake, shall receive a hundred-fold, and shall possess life everlasting' (St. Matt. xix. 29)? In response to God's gracious call you have left all things; you have taken Him as your portion; and you may exclaim with David, 'What have I in heaven, and besides Thee what do I desire upon earth?' (Ps. lxxii. 25). If there are any on earth who ought to look up with a firm hope to heaven, it is religious who should do so.

Be not disheartened or faint-hearted in your religious life, no matter what obstacles, labours, sufferings, and temptations you may meet with. When weariness comes upon you, when you feel unequal to your cares and trials, when temptation assails you, think of God and His heavenly kingdom, think of the reward awaiting you, think you hear your Guardian Angel encouraging you, and saying to you: 'Hold fast that which thou hast, that no man take thy crown' (Apoc. iii. 11). The reward that is reserved for you is of more value than all the labours you undergo to merit it, than all the struggles you make in the contest, than all the self-denial you practise, than all the pains, opposition, and persecution you suffer. You will never have to regret anything that you have done or suffered to acquire it.

Look, then, up to heaven as to your everlasting home and place of rest. There, in that kingdom of bliss, is every good which you can desire, there the realization of all your pious hopes, there the treasure

which you long to possess. Our Lord said: ' Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also ' (St. Luke xii. 34). Do not then attach yourselves inordinately to anything on earth; everything here below is insignificant in comparison with heavenly joys and riches. How soon you and all of us shall have passed away from this land of our exile! St. Paul says: ' The time is short; it remaineth that . . . they that weep be as if they wept not, and they that rejoice as if they rejoiced not . . . and they that use this world as if they used it not; for the fashion of this world passeth away ' (1 Cor. vii. 29-31). But leave nothing undone that is necessary to secure the heavenly reward; and even as St. Peter says, ' Labour the more, that by good works you may make sure your calling and election ' (2 St. Pet. i. 10). The heavenly promises are in your favour, the inheritance is before you, Divine grace will aid you, Mary and all the Angels and Saints will pray for you. ' Be glad and rejoice, for your reward is very great in heaven ' (St. Matt. v. 12).

XXII.

LOVE OF GOD.

'I came to cast fire upon the earth, and what will I but that it be kindled?'—St. Luke xii. 49.

Our Lord's mission, described in these words, has ever been going on; it lies in the power of all His followers to promote it. God wills that all hearts should be caught up by the flames of Divine charity. It should, therefore, burn in your hearts, and you should spread around you the light and warmth of this heavenly fire. But how great is the price which you should set upon it! for charity is the key of salvation. You may have faith and hope; but these will not, without charity, give you a claim to eternal life. Great as is the evil of mortal sin, it does not necessarily destroy faith and hope; but it deprives you of the exquisite grace of that charity which unites you to God: this it is which chiefly manifests how terrible and calamitous the evil of mortal sin is. As to death—which is so much dreaded—while in the predestined it changes faith into vision, and hope into realization, it brings charity to its perfection, which is union with and possession of its object—its object being no other than God Himself. This is the treasure to possess which we should part with everything else. Therefore St. Paul

says: 'If I should deliver all my goods to feed the poor, and if I should deliver up my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing' (1 Cor. xiii. 3). To this eminent virtue did he cling so perseveringly that he was able to say to the Romans: 'I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor Angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor might, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God' (viii. 38, etc.). Such an example and such assurance should inflame you with a like determination, and should lead you to set the same value as he did upon this indispensable virtue. Although the love of God may burn in your hearts and manifest itself in your lives, yet who among you would venture to say that they love God as much as they ought? and are there any so callous as not to wish to love Him more than they now love Him? This divine charity is a virtue that should be cultivated, a sacred passion that should stimulate you with ever-increasing force, and a spiritual flame that should be fanned into a greater fire by pious desires and more fervent and generous action. 'I came,' said our Lord, 'to cast fire upon the earth, and what will I but that it be kindled?'

What, forsooth, shall raise religious from the spiritual lethargy into which any may have fallen? What shall draw them out of a condition of tepidity, or of want of energy in religious life? What shall make them keenly alive to the evil of deliberate sin, even if only venial? What shall inspire them with effective earnestness in correcting their faults and

imperfections? What shall make you after the retreat take up again any religious exercises that you have neglected altogether, and fulfil with care and fidelity such as you have been remiss about? What shall make you appreciate the true value of your holy vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, and make you determined to observe them most exactly and meritoriously? What shall instigate you to the devotedness and generosity which your holy calling and its duties and works demand of you? Then finally, what shall prevent your wasting the grace of the retreat; and what shall stimulate you to persevere?

There is one conclusive answer to all these questions—one thing that can bring about all these desirable effects. What is this one thing? Is it a sense of duty? No, for such a sense is liable to fluctuation. Is it fear of spiritual loss or of punishment? No, for it might be that even the fear of hell would not always be so far realized as to keep religious fervent, although undoubtedly it should do so. Is it the desire of present and future reward? No, for heaven is always before you, yet you fail in many things. There is this one thing that can produce all these desirable effects—namely, the love of God, maintained in your heart as a living imperishable flame. This Divine charity, with all its precious supernatural effects, can do it; for, as is commonly said, love can work wonders.

You are closing the retreat with the general and generous determination of avoiding evil and doing good. Having seen the obstacles to your religious

perfection, and having repented of your faults and shortcomings—in other words, of your sins of commission and omission—you are now determined that there shall be amendment. You have also considered what your religious obligations are, and what your conduct should be, both as to your interior life and its duties; and you have formed your good resolutions accordingly. We may thus sum up the work of the retreat.

And now you should look for the means of carrying into effect what you have so fervently and generously purposed to do. You may gather from what I have already said what are the means I am going to suggest—namely, charity. Let me say that you must pray that Divine charity may be increased in your heart; and, if it is to be fruitful in you, that you must seek to cultivate it by your generous co-operation and fidelity. Then, even if the task before you in life were twice as difficult as it really is, charity would sustain you and enable you to accomplish it.

To understand this, let us study the excellence of this virtue in its fruits or happy results. The first result is a spirit of generosity. You cannot be fervent religious without this spirit. But see the inestimable value of Divine charity, for only charity can beget it. Religious generosity buds forth from charity as the beautiful blossom comes forth from the vigorous plant. Besides, this spirit of generosity is one of the healthy manifestations of your charity; for charity, we know, seeks for ways of showing itself.

When you weigh your obligations, and consider the continual call that there is upon your devotedness, you become convinced that no fickle, half-hearted, or callous effort will sustain you and enable you to do well and faithfully all that is required of you. Though you are not obliged to be heroic, your duties yet demand that you should be generous. If your self-examination has convinced you of your having failed in various ways in your religious duties and in the spirit of your service of your Divine Lord, has it not been chiefly owing to a lack of generosity? Where shall we find religious dutiful and fervent who are not generous? Seek, then, for this desirable spirit of generosity; Divine charity will beget it.

Take another view of charity: charity is the only guarantee of your continued fidelity, of your perseverance. Perseverance is its second fruit. We read in the Canticle of Canticles (viii. 6, 7): 'Love is strong as death; many waters cannot quench charity'; no, the flame is too strong and persistent. 'Charity,' St. Paul says, 'never falleth away.' And St. John supplies the reason of this where he says: 'He that abideth in charity, abideth in God, and God in him' (1 St. John iv. 16). Truly, then, charity is a treasure, to possess which you should be ready to part with everything else; it is a gift of God which should be the object of your constant prayer. The Divine Lord and Master to Whom and to Whose service you have consecrated yourselves, wishes you to be united to Him by a special and *abiding* bond of love. 'Abide,' He says, 'in My love.' He insists upon your abiding in Him; He even threatens you

with fatal consequences if you fail to abide in Him. In other words, you have to cling to His grace and to adopt all the means necessary to protect it and increase it. This is His desire. Do you not, according to your opportunities, strive to inculcate this constancy in the love of our Lord in the hearts of others? Be not less zealous in nourishing it in your own heart. How precious in the sight of God are the faithful hearts of all fervent, God-loving religious! What deep and consoling meaning our Lord's words contain for them: 'He that loveth Me, shall be loved of My Father: and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him' (St. John xiv. 21); 'If any one love Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him, and will make Our abode with him' (xiv. 23). How thankful you should be for these Divine words! What a consoling assurance they imply and convey of the constant support of grace in all your needs, and of your perseverance in grace! O that we could understand the true value of Divine charity! It is the pure spring from which issues the water of which our Lord said to the Samaritan woman: 'He that shall drink of the water that I will give him, shall not thirst for ever. But the water that I will give him shall become in him a fountain of water springing up into life everlasting' (St. John iv. 13, 14).

In the third place, charity is that precious gift which alone can attract the Divine complacency. Knowledge, accomplishments, talents, courage, and every other gift, natural or supernatural, without charity, would fail to attract it. Behold, then, a

third most happy result of charity. It is charity which gives value in God's eyes to our actions, even to the least. It, as it were, turns everything it touches into gold, and, under the operations of grace, it bears unlimited development, and communicates its heat around.

Fourthly, from charity result edification and a holy influence over others. What wonders pious religious can do by their edifying words and example! How beneficially for themselves, children and others are drawn towards them and fall under their influence! When they teach, or give advice, or attend the sick, how much good these religious are able to accomplish! They resemble the wise virgins who had plenty of oil in their lamps, and who were ready when the bridegroom came. Fill, then, your lamps with the oil of charity: charity will perfect and maintain your virtue, and enable you to spread around you the good odour of Christ; and even when you have passed away, the fruits of your good works and good example will remain.

Behold now a fifth fruit. Divine charity will sweeten your labour, and yield you consolation in times of trial. What an encouragement it affords you, when the work is arduous, to be able to say to yourselves: 'I am doing this for God'; and, under the sufferings and various trials of life, to be able to say: 'I willingly bear everything for God's sake'! This is practical charity.

Lastly, as a sixth fruit, charity deprives even death of its terrors. We read that when Samuel was about to visit Agag with the punishment of his

heartless cruelties, the wretched man exclaimed: 'Doth bitter death separate in this manner?' (1 Kings xv. 32). But how different does death appear to the pious Christian, and especially to devout religious who are sustained and consoled by charity! If, when death comes, the parting from those dear to them in life causes some pang of sorrow, it is more than compensated by the nearness of their reward. Then, more than ever, do they realize that they belong to God, Whose summons they are about to obey; and then the instincts and hopes founded upon charity lead them to cast themselves confidently upon the Divine mercy, and to look assuredly to their union with God.

In viewing the fruits and happy results of charity, we might proceed to yet a further consideration, and see how charity is inventive, how it seeks ways of proving itself; but you have already sufficient matter for your mind to reflect upon in order to satisfy you of its excellence and necessity. Charity is, indeed, termed by the Holy Ghost the fulfilment of the law (Rom. xiii. 10). It is the holy and sweet law of love, under which you must live at all times and in all places, and which will bring joy and peace to your soul all the days of your life.

But charity can never settle down to inaction; it will carry you, for God's sake, to labour for your neighbour's good. We have fallen upon times when, because iniquity has abounded, the charity of many has become cold (St. Matt. xxiv. 12). Hence follows all the greater necessity of keeping your own fervour alive by assiduity in all the observances of the

religious life; and of an earnest endeavour, within the sphere of your vocation, to do what you can to promote piety in all of whom you have any charge, or who come within the scope of your influence. A great deal of what we may term worldly love is mere sentiment, and not to be counted upon; but such is not the character of true love of God: it is practical and ever active. Happily you are not strangers to it. The works carried on by your Institute give evidence of your zeal, begotten of supernatural charity. Much of your work may be little noticed or even known, and still less spoken of. Instruction is the seed of knowledge; Christian teaching is the seed of faith and piety. Religious who are engaged in imparting secular knowledge are benefactors to mankind. They should supernaturalize their labours so as to sanctify them. Let them therefore impart this teaching for the love of God and their neighbour. Religious who instruct children in Christian knowledge are coadjutors of the pastors of the Church. They are, in a sense, ministers of grace; for they assist to build up the spiritual edifice, and to implant in the youthful mind the fund of holy knowledge which points out the path of duty, and is a guide in the way of salvation. What a rich blessing these labours will bring upon religious who are engaged in them! But are you really devoted to them? Are you zealous in accomplishing them? Let your charity manifest itself in this class of duty. How grand and how far-reaching are its results! They extend beyond the horizon of this world's existence. What scope these works afford for your

charity! 'I came to cast fire upon the earth, and what will I but that it be kindled?' The kindling, feeding, and extending of this fire of faith and piety result largely from the religious instruction and influence under which the youthful mind is brought during the years devoted to education. Join prayer to labour; ask God to bless your efforts. Leave nothing undone to work successfully in so important a cause.

If there are any other works confided to your care, let holy charity stimulate your zeal and fill you with devotedness in their accomplishment. Your work is not for man, but for God; and where the immediate object of your solicitude does indeed appear to be a fellow-creature, remember that our Lord will take as done to Himself whatever you do, for His sake, to benefit your neighbour (St. Matt. xxv. 40). Charity, as I said before, turns everything it touches into gold. How many agencies, alas, there are in the world that are ruinous to souls! What irreligion! what creature-love! what immorality! Where are the agencies of good? and what is their energy? Oh, do not hold back in the cause of God and religion! Manifest your love and your devotedness. Labour all the more earnestly because the evil agencies are multiplied, and powerful, and are labouring with such sad results. Pray for greater charity, that your efforts may be more sanctified, more devoted, and more effectual.

Look upon yourselves as called upon, within the sphere of your holy vocation, to keep alive and spread abroad the fire of Divine charity. You will

do this by piety and prayer, by edification, and by fidelity and earnestness in accomplishing the works to which your Institute is devoted. St. Paul says: 'Be not weary in well-doing' (2 Thess. iii. 13). The absence of Divine charity in you would not only lead to tepidity and indifference about the obligations that bear immediately upon your own personal sanctification, but would also lead to some neglect in such works as are confided to your solicitude for the spiritual benefit of your neighbour. Be zealous about these works.

Our Lord's command to love Him is a special message to each and every one among you. This message has reached you, and has been repeated again and again. Do not look around to see what others are doing; but let all religious take the message to themselves, and ask of our Lord the grace to love Him with all the love that He demands of their own particular heart. Your love will be a response to our Lord's; it will be a pure flame ignited by the fire of His incomprehensible Divine charity. His love speaks to you through the Incarnation, through the Life, Passion, and Death of your Saviour, through His Precious Wounds, through His Sacred Heart, through His heavenly doctrine, through the Blessed Sacrament, and through all the channels of grace. You are in astonishment at its immensity and at its condescensions. Your response will, at best, be but feeble; strive, however, that it may be all that it can be. The hymns of the Blessed in heaven, if they expressed no love, would not be as sweet music before the Throne of God; the

love of all our hearts must be as many notes struck, responsive to grace, making chords of tuneful harmony, from land to land, and shore to shore, throughout the world; giving to the Sacred Heart the praise and homage which our Lord seeks from His Spouse the Church. Our love, then, must be an act of personal worship, and, at the same time, a contribution to the cumulative homage of all the faithful who comprise the Church of God, the Spouse of the Lamb.

Pray, then, for this inestimable gift of charity; pray that it may receive further increase in your heart. Thus will you be more closely united to God, and your actions, perfumed by this sweet odour, will be more pleasing to Him, and your lives will be more meritorious. Moreover, through Divine charity, not only will you be good in yourselves, but it will enable you to do much good to others, and thus increase your merit.

The fountains of charity are ever open to you in the daily Mass which you have the happiness to hear, in your frequent Communions, and in your religious exercises. The wonder should be, not that you are fervent, but that with such means of sanctification you are not overflowing with Divine charity, and that you are not ever seeking for ways of manifesting it.

What should be its ordinary manifestation in you? Our Divine Lord said: 'If you love Me, keep My commandments.' Yes; and because you love our Lord, you will also observe your vows most carefully, you will keep your rules faithfully, you will

fulfil your duties assiduously, you will love your vocation ardently, you will sacrifice yourselves willingly, you will bear trials patiently, and, God helping you, you will persevere courageously in the ways of religion and piety. You are now prepared to give this manifestation of your charity; thus will you prove that it is real. All this will indeed be, in your view, but too small a return to make to the Divine Lord Who has first loved you; Who has given His life for your salvation; and Who has called you to so privileged a vocation. But your charity will need stimulating. Go, then, with the Saints to learn lessons of Divine charity in the school of our Lord's most loving Heart and Sacred Passion.

To-morrow morning you close the retreat by renewing your vows; this solemn act will be an earnest of your love of God. You will then profess, as it were, before heaven and earth that you rejoice in being the servants of God, and your act will signify that you would not, on any account whatsoever, withdraw anything of your first consecration of yourselves to God. That first consecration was made when you were in your first fervour, and when your young hearts beat warm with the love of God and of your holy calling. Now that you have seen some service in the good cause, now that years are perhaps telling upon you, let your renewal be made with even redoubled fervour, even with the fervour with which you would wish to make it if you knew that it was to be the last. With willing hands draw again around you the golden chains of your religious

bondage, and give the key in keeping to our Lord, to hold until your death.

After the renewal of your vows, go on your ways more earnest in the practice of the religious virtues, more faithful to duty, more zealous in doing good, and more patient under your necessary burden of trials; that you may be able to look forward with all the greater confidence to the indescribable reward which God has prepared in His kingdom for those who love Him.

You are going to face once more the trials, labours, and temptations of your life and calling; but Divine charity will support you. You know that your love must be proved. God helping you, you will show that it is true. 'Blessed,' says St. James, 'is the man that endureth temptation; for when he hath been proved, he shall receive the crown of life, which God hath promised to them that love Him' (i. 12).

CLOSE OF THE RETREAT.

XXIII.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS.

'Glory and wealth shall be in his house: and his justice remaineth for ever and ever.'—Ps. cxi. 3.

It may be said that, during these days of recollection and retreat, you have sharpened your weapons and refurbished your arms to prepare yourselves to engage once more in the warfare of life. In the light of your obligations you have examined your dispositions and reviewed your conduct. Finally, you have taken good resolutions to help you and steady your future conduct, and you have completed the pious exercises of the retreat by approaching the holy sacrament of Penance. If you have made the retreat well, you may be sure that you have derived from so doing many benefits. It has been intended, in God's dispensations, as a means of correcting your faults, of supplying your omissions, of remedying your neglect, and of renewing your fidelity and fervour. How happy you should be if such results have been obtained! You may now borrow the words of David, saying, in a spirit of gratitude and confidence, to God Who has so blessed you: 'Thy

discipline hath corrected me unto the end: and Thy discipline, the same shall teach me. . . . Thou hast girded me with strength unto battle' (Ps. xvii. 36, 40). Thou hast shown me where correction is needed, be Thou always my teacher; in Thy strength I will renew the conflict.

Although you are now about to resume your usual avocations, fully resolved to do this with increased devotedness, and more fully impressed with the obligation of attending to your interior perfection and to exterior religiousness—you do not forget that you have not yet parted with the 'old man' that is in you. You are aware that you have still to contend with your natural weaknesses and with a certain tendency towards what is evil. These obstacles to your perfection and happiness will continue to harass you. Moreover, you will still have to exert yourselves, and to bear 'the burden of the day and the heats' until the night shall come for you 'when no man can work' (St. John ix. 4). You should therefore be prepared to keep up a continual warfare against your spiritual enemies, and to persevere in your labours. You will, however, mistrust yourselves and will have constant recourse to God for the help from on high which will fill you with courage and confidence, and which will sustain you until you reach the day of triumph and repose. In this help is your hope; it has not been wanting to you in the past, it will not fail you in the future. Animate yourselves with the sentiments with which David was inspired when he said: 'I have lifted up my eyes to the mountains, from whence help shall

come to me. My help is from the Lord, Who made heaven and earth. Behold, He shall neither slumber nor sleep that keepeth Israel. The Lord keepeth thee from all evil: may the Lord keep thy soul. May the Lord keep thy coming in and thy going out; from henceforth now and for ever' (Ps. cxx).

It is the time now, at the end of your retreat, to strengthen yourselves in the good purposes which occurred to you from time to time during it. These purposes may be summed up as a firm determination to live henceforth faithful to the obligations of your state, and to aim at the holiness of life which, you hope, will bring down the Divine blessing on all you do. Whatever others may do, you are fully resolved, God helping you, not to fall back into a careless or unsatisfactory way of living. 'Stand fast,' St. Paul says, 'and be not held again under the yoke of bondage' (Gal. v. 1). 'Be ye steadfast and immovable: always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labour is not vain in the Lord' (1 Cor. xv. 58). There will still be around you the mists of delusive worldliness, and you may have to breathe the infectious atmosphere of disedifying behaviour; and there will lie in various directions carefully concealed but perhaps fatal pitfalls, and the misguiding tracks of unsafe counsel; while restless 'self,' resisting the goad of a wise discipline, may weary you with its struggles and importunities; and the predominant failing may seek to bring you again to follow its leading in the downward way. Will you allow yourselves to be deceived or to be led astray from the holy path upon which you have

now entered so fervently? No; you are thankful to God for the graces that have been bestowed upon you during the retreat. You have felt the desire to correct your faults, and to be more observant in the future; and now, full of courage and renewed in fervour, you are determined, with the help of God's grace, to give effect to your desire.

Be resolved, then, not to make any compromise with indifference, cowardice, or sluggishness. Take counsel in all you do with Wisdom, and not with the dictates of nature, or of the world, or of disedifying religious. What does Wisdom teach you? She invites you to walk with all circumspection in the fear of God, in the practice of all goodness, in discipline and in self-denial; holding in horror all evil, malice, folly, envy, jealousy, and contention, and living in peace with God and with all men. Such are the lessons that are found in the inspired writings. Consider, too, what are the teaching and advice of spiritual writers. Are they not always on the side of virtue, piety, and observance? What, again, are the admirable lessons and prescriptions of your holy rule? Are not these also exhortations and directions in the science of interior and exterior perfection? Reflect well upon all this body of holy teaching which is set before you, and ask yourselves seriously if you can put yourselves in opposition to it, or if you can disregard it, without folly and danger. Ah, no; it is as a light and a voice from God, inviting you to walk as wise and not as unwise religious in the path of your beautiful vocation. 'See, therefore, brethren,' St. Paul says, 'how you

walk circumspectly; not as unwise, but as wise; redeeming the time, because the days are evil' (Eph. v. 15, 16). Take counsel, therefore, in all you do with Wisdom: other counsellors will misdirect you.

Of whom does the psalmist say: 'Glory and wealth shall be in his house: and his justice remaineth for ever and ever'? He says it of the servant of God who is instructed by Wisdom—of 'the man that feareth the Lord,' and who 'shall delight exceedingly in His commandments' (Ps. cxi. 1). This is the description that the psalmist gives of the truly wise man. Such a man fears God, and Solomon says: 'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom' (Prov. ix. 10); such a man loves to obey God, and to him the yoke of the commandments is not disagreeable but sweet. The Holy Ghost declares such a man 'Blessed.' The description applies equally to good religious; and the blessing and the reward pronounced by the Holy Ghost shall therefore be theirs.

What a consolation it should be for you, while you are wisely striving to accomplish all your duties and to walk in the way of perfection, to know that this conduct is pleasing to God and a source of great merit to you! 'Glory and wealth shall be in his house.' How happy it should make you, if you are good religious, to reflect that, by God's favour and bountiful dispensation, and in view of our Lord's infinite merits, your actions, offered to God, will be rewarded in this life by countless graces and blessings, and will cause an accumulation of merits for a heavenly and eternal reward in the life to come!

You add to these merits by every work that you render pleasing to God; so, day by day, you lay by in the unseen storehouse a rich treasure, 'a treasure in heaven which faileth not' (St. Luke xii. 33)—which shall, in God's good time, be exchanged for a most ample reward. You may be poor and weak, humble and of no account, deficient in worldly knowledge, and unheeded by society; but you will not be wanting in wisdom nor be without its desirable fruits if, walking in holy fear, you strive to please God by a fervent religious life, and by assiduity in devoting yourselves to the works of your holy Institute. Treading thus in the footsteps of the Saints, you will merit much in God's sight, and you will earn for yourselves the heavenly reward: 'Glory and wealth shall be in his house.'

It should be to you a source of further consolation to feel that God will preserve you in His holy service—that He will maintain you in His grace. The Holy Ghost says of the devout servant of God: 'His justice remaineth for ever and ever.' Left to yourselves you might indeed be overcome and fall away, for great and good men have, before now, fallen away; they forsook the paths of wisdom. You, however, are resolved to persevere in those paths, and you look to God for His help to maintain you in them. He will not disappoint you; for, as St. Paul says, 'it is God Who worketh in you, both to will and to accomplish, according to His good will' (Phil. ii. 13).

That the way of good religious is the way which you should consider the desirable one for you to

pursue and to remain steadfast in is a point not open to controversy. The more your wisdom has with time become mature, from observation, knowledge, and experience, the stronger has your conviction upon this point become. You have desired this way for others as well as for yourselves—particularly when others, by their irreligious conduct, have disedified you, or caused you alarm or misgiving. You saw what was wanting in their case; see that it be not wanting in your own.

If it is so certain that the way of good religious is the desirable way, how shall we explain why many religious depart from it? No doubt various reasons will suggest themselves to you. Let us consider only three which may be termed ordinary ones. Religious depart from the way of regular observance and piety because they do not duly appreciate it, or because of neglect, or, again, because of sloth.

In the first place, religious are to be met with who do not value religious life for its own sake, nor for the special good which dutifulness in it would bring them. In their case there is deficient the very groundwork necessary for stability. Why, then, should we wonder if they fall away from fervour, and disedify by breaches of discipline? They need to pray in the words of David: 'Teach me goodness and discipline and knowledge' (Ps. cxviii. 66)—three essentials of a devout and meritorious life. Some religious of this class would almost appear to think that, if they make some little attempt to keep their rule, they therefore place their superiors under an obligation to them. Has it not perhaps occurred

that superiors have even had to use coaxing and promises in order to induce religious of this class to assist at the religious exercises? How humiliating this would be for any Institute in which love of the religious life and observance should have ebbed away to so low a level! What sad consequences might not follow if such a falling away were to become general! What spiritual deprivation we may expect in the wreckers of the beautiful fabric put together by saintly servants of God, blessed from on high, and approved by ecclesiastical authority! Servants of God built it up: be persuaded that it will not be servants of God who pull it down. Who will they be who will engage in the sacrilegious attempt? They will be religious of undisciplined lives and ill-regulated consciences, conceited in their own erroneous notions, unwilling to receive correction, and seekers of the praise and support of seculars. From all such religious, if they are not speedily converted by true sorrow and amendment, may every Institute be happily delivered! As to yourselves, strive to walk in all humility; ask our Lord to give you a due appreciation of the religious life and its blessings, and to preserve you in fervour; for 'His fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly cleanse His floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire' (St. Matt. iii. 12).

We attribute, in the second place, to neglect the falling away of religious from their fervour. It is noticeable how soon after their retreat some religious begin to be remiss in their exercises, and in fulfilling their other obligations. Their affection for ob-

servance lessens and gradually dies away, and this is the result of neglect. You should, after your retreat, keep yourselves to an exact observance until a habit of it is formed; and this observance should be maintained not only in the exterior, but also with pious dutifulness. If the remiss conduct of any religious should give rise to a fear that piety is unreal, or that it is diminishing in the community, take care not to give countenance to such neglect by your own want of piety and observance.

There is also a neglect of another kind, the neglect of precautions. There have been religious who shortly after their retreat began to relax their strictness in avoiding the known causes or dangerous occasions of their faults and falls. While the strictness was maintained, happy and consoling results followed from it; but when it was relaxed these religious became unguarded, and even rash, and they attributed this to their being less scrupulous. Soon, however, they gave way again to regrettable failings which they had considered themselves done with for ever. What should your conduct be? You should, after your retreat, consider it unpardonable to expose yourselves unnecessarily under any pretext to your previous falls, and you should exercise uncompromising discipline in guarding yourselves against them.

A third kind of neglect is the neglect of self-denial. You must be persuaded that you cannot be good religious without the practice of self-denial. You have to exercise it in correcting and restraining your appetites, your self-love, your desire of amuse-

ment, your tendency to dissipation, your love of independence, your own will; but if you fail to do so, every kind of religious irregularity may creep in and carry you away from your duty, with the sad result of detriment to piety, fervour, and merit.

You should therefore be on your guard against remissness in practising self-denial. After your retreat, you should prove yourselves more attached to the interior life, more anxious to draw fruit from religious observance and from the pious exercises enjoined by your rule—fidelity to which observance cannot but demand some proper planning of your time—some foregoing of promised pleasures, some sacrifice of your convenience, and some interference with your various occupations which are not to the purpose.

In the third place, we find the falling away of religious from fervour after their retreat attributable in some cases to sloth. You have therefore to be upon your guard against idleness, inactivity, shirking labour, and taking needless rest, such faults being utterly incompatible with religious fervour and devotedness. Beware also of indulging that feeling of monotony which, by taking your heart off your work, leads to weariness and discontent, and to a desire of change. Do you ever hear religious say, 'It is always the same thing; what a tie it is to be always following the same regulation; what a perfect slavery to be always obliged to attend the community exercises'? There is another monotony of which these religious never seem to tire—I mean the service of the body. You never hear them declare

that it is monotonous to sit down to their meals three times a day, to take their repose, or to attend in other ways to the needs of the body and the relaxation of the mind; no, the monotony which is pronounced intolerable is the holy discipline which helps to sanctify the soul and bring it nearer to God. No one pretends that such a discipline is not at first, and even perhaps at all times, trying to nature; but by the aid of grace, bountifully bestowed, you can subject yourselves to it not only by compulsion—as being a matter of duty—but even willingly as to a useful discipline that you prize and desire. Grace will make the yoke sweet and the burden light. After your retreat you should be eager to subject the body to the soul, the flesh to the spirit, nature to grace. You should therefore gradually but effectually bring your perhaps stubborn neck to bend to the wholesome yoke of duty and piety, until religiousness shall become as a second nature, when its wise requirements will command your ready and devout compliance.

You easily recognize what a perversity that is which leads men to love foolishness rather than wisdom, darkness rather than light, doubt and error rather than truth, the things of sense rather than those of the spirit, the body that perishes rather than the soul that is immortal; which leads them to see a greater attraction in the creature than in the Divine Creator; which causes them to follow the ways of vice rather than those of virtue, the guidance of nature rather than that of grace; and which makes them turn their minds more readily to earthly satis-

factions than to the promised heavenly rewards. Finally, you easily recognize what a perversity that is which makes men select the broad road of sin, waywardness, worldliness, selfishness, neglect of religion, and sloth, leading to destruction, rather than the narrow road of piety, duty, and perfection, leading to eternal life. Well, it is a perversity of the same order, though of a less pronounced kind—but a perversity all the while—which causes religious, consecrated to God and bound to tend to perfection, to lead a remiss life of neglect, imperfection, and non-observance, rather than a life devoted to a loyal and generous compliance with all the obligations of their holy calling.

Let us now sum up these final considerations suggested at the close of the retreat by a retrospective glance at what has been said during it, and by a prospective glance towards the difficulties and the hopes and fears of your future life. You have seen that you must not fall back, but persevere; that wisdom counsels you to walk in the way of religious dutifulness; that the servants of God who follow that path are wise, happy, and blessed; and that it is a path of conduct which recommends itself to you and to all who are earnestly religious. You considered finally the obstacles to your pursuing that path or the causes of departure from it—namely, want of due appreciation of its excellence and advantages, also neglect and sloth.

With such lessons before you, and impressed as you now are by a desire of profiting by them, shall it come to pass that you will not heed them? Will

you, through half-heartedness or indifference, allow yourselves to fall again under the bondage of your imperfections? To enjoy the sweetness of God's intimate friendship and the holy liberty of His children, it is necessary that you should not only keep your conscience free from grievous sin, but that you should also strive to avoid every kind of sin. Your endeavour should be to fulfil as perfectly as possible the precept of loving God with your whole heart, and therefore to spend your lives in piety and dutifulness in the holy sphere of work to which you have been called. Let such be your firm determination. You need the grace to accomplish it; and you are fully convinced that God will not deny you this grace. Ask it, in the first place, of the Sacred Heart: 'O Sacred Heart of Jesus, object of our tenderest devotion, grant us out of the rich treasury of Thy bounties, and in the full measure of our many needs, help and grace to spend well and religiously the days or years that remain to us in life. Inflame our hearts with a sincere desire of God's glory and of our own sanctification. Draw us closer to Thee in the ways of piety, inspire us with zeal, and bless our lives, our communities, and our works.'

Ask this grace, in the next place, through the intercession of Mary, your Immaculate Queen and Mother. 'O Mary, Immaculate Mother of God, we cast ourselves once more at your feet with our needs and our anxieties. We have not lived as we should, nor laboured as we ought. Knowing our weakness and our unworthiness, we beseech you to obtain for

us by your powerful intercession the grace to continue in piety, fidelity, and zeal, that our lives may be pleasing to God, to Whom we have consecrated them, and to you, under whose protection we have placed them.'

Let religious life be henceforth amongst you what it should be, and strive to maintain it in all its vigour. Then will you respect and esteem one another; then will the faithful hold you in honour; then will the Church be edified; then will your labours be fruitful in good and in merit; then may you be filled with confidence that your end will be in peace and your reward in everlasting glory. 'The just shall be in everlasting remembrance: he shall not fear the evil hearing . . . his justice remaineth for ever and ever: his horn shall be exalted in glory' (Ps. cxi. 7, 9).

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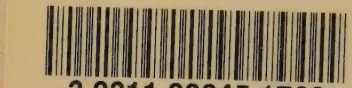

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